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Invention

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Contents

Introduction:
Invention 1

Alvin Coffey—California, 1849 3
E. Hughes

The Reinvention of the Slave 4
Delali Kumavie

Invention as Ideological Reproduction 15
Ziyana Lategan

Blackness: N'est Pas? 27
David Marriott

Untitled #2 52
Taija Mars McDougall

poised in hover hours 66
Asiya Wadud

Untimely Dispatch from the Middle of Nowhere 24 72
John Murillo III

Spinning on Blackness 81
Nicholas Brady

Freedom by Design: The House That Slavery Built 94
Egbert Alejandro Martina

Negra Hasta La Muerte (Black Until the Death) 108
Ashley Ngozi Agbasoga

All Things Are Dear That Disappear 116
Joshua Bennett

Contributors 129

Introduction:

Invention

The perils of invention begin with a leap! It is in light of Fanon's imperative that we "introduce invention into existence"[2] that this issue of *Propter Nos* gathers its writers and draws its title. Rather than revel in the triumph and glory of what invention might offer in these troubled and troubling times, the contributions in this issue offer a more Janus-faced approach to the (im)possibilities of invention. The desire and will to 'find a way out'—due to the exigency of the situation of gratuitous anti-Black violence, as well as the necessities of a radical Black imagination in motion—resonates and yet, what gathers these dissonant and destructive thinkers together is a hesitancy to locate in invention something like a pure positivity or a general capacity. It is this paradigmatic continuity of Blackness as a commodity that speaks the unspeakable, that cannot and yet must be spoken, that ruptures the logic of an invention which can one day be a tool of narratological emancipation for the Black. On the contrary, it is the underside of invention that requires excavation and interrogation if we are to unmake the invention(s) of the anti-Black World.

Herein lies an exploration of Black radical theory and praxis as invention. What are the limitations of creation and imagination when they take up the form and style of philosophical abstraction? Is Black theory itself invention of the kind Fanon sought to bring into existence? Is invention a modality of creation or creation a modality of invention? In this way what we find to be at stake in these questions are not simply the representational question of the quality of cultural objects and items, but instead what we are after is whether or not invention might itself be done otherwise—not as a testament of a positive World to come, but rather as a cataclysm of the current World order. Is it possible to create self-destruction? What might it mean to invent from the zone of non-being? These essays, poems, and experimental pieces answer the call of these questions.

What we ask of invention at this critical juncture, then, is whether or not there can be an invention of 'the new'? What mode of invention indexes the tabula rasa of a World so *other* that the only placemarker in the available grammar to discern its meaning would be *ex nihilo*? Or rather, if the end of the anti-Black World itself is not the total destruction of the metaphysical World in general then, what of the salvageable remains of this World might be reinvented into new terms and conditions? How might creation abolish fundamental technologies of violent subjection, thus removing what links the materiality of its grammar to the trauma of its ghost? Inevitably what follows is an interrogation of the logics of this anti-Black World, with arguments staged against the solidity of its hegemonic sensibility

wherein aesthetic becomes synonymous with sense. The meta-theoretical praxis and poetics these Black radical theorists, writers, and poets produce are a means of considering destructive invention—a meditation in the void, introducing violence into existence.

Endnotes

1. Christina Sharpe, "Racialized Fantasies on the Internet," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 24, no. 4 (1999), 1090.
2. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks.* New York: Grove Press, 2008, 204.
3. Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations," *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 9–89.

Alvin Coffey

––California, 1849

E. Hughes

"The pro-slavery element...of [the Fugitive Slave Law]...enabled them to bring their slaves into the State, work with them in the mines, and return to the south and back to slavery with their Negroes"
—Delilah L. Beasley

We walked a blighted trail in the late of summer
despite the indigo dead littering the path.
Mr. Duvall, my ailing master rode horseback
while I walked beside, sure to maintain pace
through prairie, through the arid Great Basin
then over the granite Sierra Nevada.
The paradox of life struck me on that expedition—
the way tragedy could arrange itself beside
the glory of a meadow of marigolds and zinnia
so perfectly ocher the field seemed engulfed
by flame; within the burn, a woman and child taken
by cholera and dehydration, leaning and vanishing
in the shadow of an overturned wagon—. How I pleaded
with the gods that I be seized too by the splendors
of demise, its power to alleviate me of this prevailing state
of being. We endured the arduous journey, made
our way through the amber hills of the Sacramento
valley. In the mines, I beat the rock for the dust of gold—
grasping what manumission would cost my body,
my breath. Three hundred dollars short of freedom
Mr. Duvall sold me back south. And I began again that
journey, that cruel constellation of return into bondage,
the way memory recalls and reopens the fathomless

wound.

The Reinvention of the Slave

Delali Kumavie

> FW: The world doesn't recognize the *time* of black dispossession; the world doesn't accept that blackness possessed a prior plenitude (a state of being a human subject) before slaves were made of us…
>
> HC: We have to put pressure on all forms of representation and whom we think we are in fact representing or think can be represented, in a given frame. And that would mean challenging linear narratives of progress and respectability, and instead conceiving of a black or queer approach to the unfolding of history from the bottom up"
>
> ––Huey Copeland in Conversation with Frank B. Wilderson III

The memorial site of the slave auction block in downtown Charlottesville, VA, became, in early Spring, the site of reinvention led by two white residents. On February 6th, 2020, Richard Allen, a 74-year-old white man, used a crowbar to remove the plaque commemorating the site of a slave auction block in the historic court neighborhood in downtown Charlottesville, VA.[1] In his confession, reported in a local news outlet, Allen underscored that his motivations were to force the city council to replace the plaque with something more noticeable, more fitting.[2] The removed auction block memorial was a rectangular bronze plaque cemented into the pavement in front of an old brick building, known as number zero (0) Court Square, located about a block and a half from City Hall. In the *New York Times* article about the incident, Allen is quoted to have said that he had been considering doing something about the slave auction block for over two years. After his confession, Allen was charged with grand larceny, possession of burglarious tools, and released on bail. Allen is a resident of Albemarle County and is described as an amateur historian and activist. He describes feeling remorseful at Charlottesville's inability to erect a "proper" monument for slavery besides Thomas Jefferson's estate in Monticello. Allen's family owned slaves, and in an interview after his confession, Allen noted his own complicity in the transatlantic slave trade by revealing that he had benefitted economically by inheriting some money from his slave-holding ancestors. He said he "inherited money that should have been paid in wages to *those* people…. I removed the *insulting* plaque and have ensured that it will not be recovered."[3] For several months leading up to Allen's removal of the plaque, another local activist, Richard Parks, had been underlining and crossing out the word 'slave' on the plaque and writing above it the words 'human,' and 'people' in chalk. Often Parks would leave flowers on or near the sidewalk where the slave auction monument was located.

Both Allen and Parks' actions raise questions about what Frank B. Wilderson in his conversation with Huey Copeland, from which this paper's epigraph was drawn, describes as the "time of black dispossession," an imposed progressive temporality unsubstantiated by the fact of black existence.[4] As a result, some questions must be posed, even if left unanswered, about representation, erasure, and their remains. Wilderson and Copeland's interrogation of blackness, the politics of representation, and memorialization provide blueprints through which I probe Parks and Allen's actions. It is tempting to ask what is achieved by striking through 'slave' and replacing it with 'human' and 'people,' but following Copeland's insistence on "putting pressure" on representational frames to recalibrate rather than probe the politics of representation, I want to interrogate who is represented by the 'slave,' and who is represented by the 'human.' What assumed teleology undergirds Parks' attempted erasure of the 'slave,' and its supplement the 'human'? Who/what is rendered unrepresentable by this reinvention? Why did these two white men deem it necessary to confer what they believed to be a more "proper" category of 'human' onto the slave? Why did Allen and Park choose to enact their corrective at the site of the slave auction memorial and not on the plethora of Confederate monuments found throughout the landscape in Charlottesville? By simultaneously disavowing the inadequate memorial representation of the slave auction block, and perhaps by extension slavery in Charlottesville, and demanding new frames of representation that strike through the rupture of enslavement, Allen and Parks' actions nonetheless fall short of any radical potential.

In what follows, I examine how Allen's removal of the plaque, Parks striking through or underlining the word 'slave' on the plaque, and his homemade plaques, form an assemblage of practices that recapitulate the politics of inclusion to cover and erase the continuing violence of slavery. By interrogating what and who is outside of the category of the 'human' in this act of re-invention, I posit that these attempts at reinventing the slave as human bound the slavery within a past-ness, which erases the ongoing violent afterlives of slavery in a place like Charlottesville. Thus, Charlottesville functions as a kind of microcosm of the seizure of the institutional memory of slavery by those who continue to benefit from slavery's ordering of the world.

Fig.1: The Bronze Slave Auction Block that Allen removed with a crowbar

Monumental Landscapes and the Preferred Teleology of Memory

Monuments are a fundamental part of Charlottesville's landscape, shaping its memories and directing attention to its constructed past. These monuments materialize and interpret events, people, and memories through material representations that reflect the self-styling of the community. Sociologist Wanda Rushing observes that monuments "embody, impose, and transmit messages about political power."[5] They act as the material historical objects that construct a trajectory for understanding and interpreting the past as it relates to the present and the future. Throughout Charlottesville, these monuments signify the historical and aspirational past of this mid-size Virginian city, culminating in representations of its most famous resident, Thomas Jefferson, and prominent figures of the Confederacy, such as Andrew Jackson and Robert Lee. These monuments to the Confederacy, according to Rushing, were erected four to five decades after the end of the Civil War, with many being erected between 1890 and 1920, when the political gains of Reconstruction were siphoned away, and White supremacists controlled the American south.[6] These monuments remain embedded in the visible landscape, inspiring awe, celebration, and disavowal. They assert that the breadth of slavery and its violence is a thing of the past, existing only as part of the memorial landscape.

It is through the events of August 11th and 12th, 2017, that these monuments burst into the national consciousness of the broader U.S public. Long before the gathering of white supremacists' organizations that led to the brutal assault of DeAndre Harris, the ongoing trauma endured by black people in Charlottesville, and the death of Heather Hayer, the monuments in Charlottesville emblematized the larger racial violence at the foundation of the American nation-state and its imperial logic. In other words, the foundations of the American nation, as

represented in its monumental landscape, visualize the "history of racist ideas at the foundations, not just of the Civil War, but our nation's history writ large."[7]

These monuments form a network of Charlottesville's history of slavery and its continuing subjection of black people to the everyday violence of antiblackness. Louise Nelson writes in "Object Lessons: Monuments and Memory in Charlottesville" about the four Confederate monuments that transformed the city after Reconstruction. The monuments of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark (1919), Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson (1921); George Rogers Clark (1921), and Robert Edward Lee (1924) were erected to demonstrate the "unflinching testaments to the collapse of Reconstruction and the re-establishment of white supremacy" (18). Nelson continues by contending that "as public art, they inscribed that victory into the fabric of the city" (18). If we accept Nelson's premise, then we must ask what this says about the slave auction memorial. Unlike these confederate monuments, the slave auction block does not occupy much space in Charlottesville's visual landscape. It is embedded in the sidewalk in front of a brick building in the historic downtown neighborhood, across from the courthouse where Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe were said to hold meetings. If one is not looking down, the auction block is easily missed. Like the enslaved people it memorializes, the auction block literally occupies the ground on which the denizens of the city tread. It is a haunting metaphor of the degraded station that the enslaved occupied in the modern world-system. Implanted in the pavement of a neighborhood where the institutions that sustain white supremacists' systems of capture and imprisonment of the black body—the judiciary, the sheriff's department, and the police station—the slave auction block affirms the kind of invisibility that Robert Musil observed in his assertion that "there is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument."[8] Though Musil had envisioned this invisibility as precipitated by mass media and the receding of the historical significance of monuments, this phrasing aptly captures the peculiar erasure that the slave auction block embodies. In light of the events in Charlottesville in August 2017, the confederate monuments are impossible to ignore. Situated in geographical high points across the city, elevated on plinths, surrounded by parks and clearings, the Confederate monuments are positioned to be highly visible imposing objects to allow for their long-lasting representational force. However, the small rectangular bronze and concrete marker on the pavement, which marked the site of the slave auction block, was almost invisible. Now the only sign of it having existed in this specific location is the homemade plaque and flowers that have replaced it.

Just five miles from downtown Charlottesville, Thomas Jefferson's estate, Monticello, serves as a monument to his legacy. It is through the memorialization of Jefferson that slavery emerges, tucked away from Charlottesville proper in Monticello. Jefferson, who in his infamous book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, outlined the myth of racial difference (as skin color, biological differences, and mental ability) is everywhere present in Charlottesville's memorial landscape.[9] Indeed, it is in

the events surrounding the August 11th and 12th that the largest employer in Charlottesville and another of Jefferson's "achievements," the University of Virginia (UVa), would begin to confront its history of slavery and racism, and also build its own monument to slavery. Monticello has been slow in acknowledging Sally Hemings as a significant part of Jefferson's heritage.[10] For instance, it was only in 2018 that an exhibition was curated dedicated to memorializing the Hemmings and other enslaved families in Monticello. Throughout Albemarle county, of which Charlottesville is a part, monuments to slavery and black residence are entangled with those that celebrate the Confederacy or Jim Crow or its leading white residents. Put differently, those black bodies that animate these monuments, the black bodies whose labor undergird the city's wealth, are reminded each day of their *unrepresentable* past.

Within Charlottesville, there has been an attempt to provide contextualization into this violent past through guided tours. Led by UVa faculty member, Prof. Jalane Schmidt, and the principal of Jefferson School, Dr. Andrea Douglas, these tours seek to historicize the Confederate monuments by revealing Charlottesville's entrenchment in slavery, its ties to the Ku Klux Klan, and its continuing dispossession of black residents through incarceration and displacement.[11] However, they are regularly interrupted by white supremacists who honk their cars and yell things like, "keep them up!" and "never forget!"[12] The high cost of housing, persistent segregation, and housing shortages has meant that many of those who work at UVa cannot afford to live in the city. [13] These monuments form a kind of visual network that depicts Charlottesville's history of slavery and its continuing subjection of blacks to the daily violence of enslavement.

Supplementing the Slave

This slave auction monument, which itself reads, "SLAVE AUCTION BLOCK: On this site, slaves were bought and sold," is situated adjacent to the historic courthouse building where the founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe all had their offices. After an earlier plaque, which was affixed to an exterior wall at eye level, mysteriously disappeared, a bronze plaque was embedded in the pavement to replace it. After Allen removed this plaque, Parks created a handmade sign for the empty space. Parks' plaque read: "Human auction site: In 1619 the first African kidnap victims arrived in V.A. Buying and selling of humans ended in 1865. For 246 years this barbaric trade took place on sites like this." There is a strange irony in replacing one form of representation for another. Whereas the first monument keeps vague the temporal markers of slavery, Parks' plaque, by proclaiming an end to slavery in 1865, creates a teleological narrative arc which identifies a beginning and end to slavery. It affirms the myth that emancipation ended slavery, allowing the inheritors of slavery's capital to be absolved of any obligations or complicity. It leaves out the many ways that the systemic and structural economy

of slavery continues under other guises in Charlottesville, the United States, and the world at large.

It is as a response to this temporally bounded understanding of slavery that Calvin Warren avers that slavery is an "event-horizon that expresses itself in endless disguise, through a time outside of duration—black time."[14] Warren's understanding that slavery cannot be bounded within a linear temporal logic because it possesses an "unsettling lifespan" that is "continually regenerated, reborn, and reincarnated" elucidates why Parks' attempts at memorialization fails to grapple with slavery's ongoing presence at the site of the auction block, in Charlottesville and beyond.[15] Attempts to memorialize slavery too often remain caught in a time-trap that insists on beginnings and ends. These pitfalls into "continuity and progression" cannot comprehend as Saidiya Hartman does in "The Time of Slavery" when she writes, "then and now coexist; we are coeval with the dead."[16]

On the right side of the Du Bois' color line, Parks acts out his powers of invention to trap the slave in a temporal prison by seeking to replace the word 'slave' with something else. By striking through 'slave' and writing 'human,' Parks intends to acknowledge the biological symmetry between the enslaved Africans who arrived and continued to arrive by boat or through birth, after the shipload that docked in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, with their white masters. It also sentences the 'slave' to history, to a past event that has an identifiable endpoint in 1865. Needless to say, slavery continued in various forms well after 1865 throughout the Atlantic world and beyond, creating a system of hierarchy where "the black person mirrored for the society what human being was *not*."[17] Park's periodization of slavery from 1619 to 1865 acts as a kind of temporal *hold* that limits the mutations of slavery and its afterlives and skips over the structurally enforced oppression that slavery created and the state sustains.

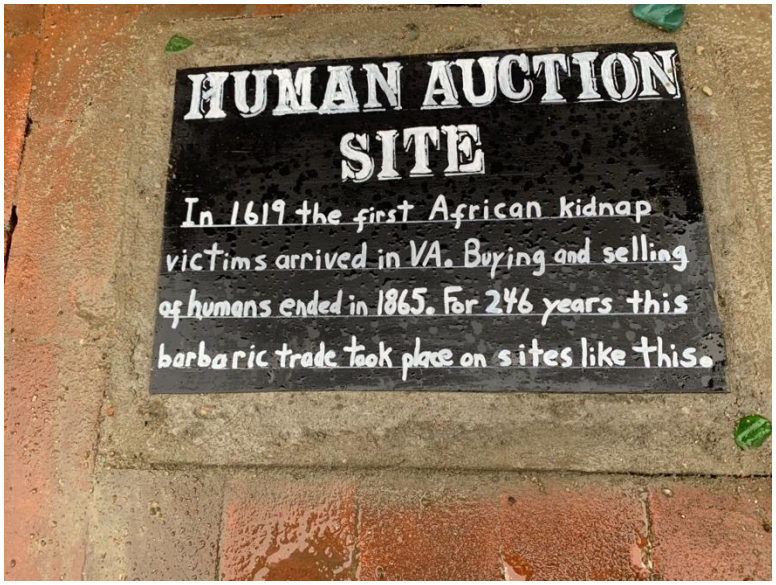
HUMAN AUCTION SITE
In 1619 the first African kidnap victims arrived in VA. Buying and selling of humans ended in 1865. For 246 years this barbaric trade took place on sites like this.

Fig. 2: Parks' homemade plaque

By replacing or writing above the word 'slave' with 'human,' Parks reanimates what he intended to erase, or more precisely strikethrough. This act resonates with Derrida's early concept of "sous rature" which is, according to Spivak, "the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience" (xvii). The 'slave,' despite Parks' attempts at writing above and/or writing over it, is still present, and part of the matrix of meaning that is entailed in 'human.' Indeed, to use another Derridean term, the word 'human' acts as a supplement to 'slave,' it interrupts, intervenes, and replaces, yet its meaning cannot be disentangled from 'slave'. The supplement, as a concept, emerges in Derrida's interpretation of Rousseau's understanding of writing as a supplement for speech and is described by Derrida as an addition, a "surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest *measure* of presence."[18] The supplement, according to Gerasimos Kakoliris, also "shelters another meaning whose cohabitation with the first is both strange and necessary."[19] Kakoliris further elaborates that in order for the supplement to function as a substitute, it must "resemble in some essential way that which it replaces."[20] 'Slave' and 'human' are conceptually entangled as a supplement. While the 'slave' designates a lack that is present in 'human,' or that which exists at the boundary of the 'human,' it is essentially through the act of distilling the black slave from the white human that the borders between them conceptually are laid out. If 'slave' denotes and connotes a category that is *not quite* "human," a commodity, a means of socio-economic stratification, it nonetheless still bears a resemblance that makes the supplement possible.

The alterity that is asserted by Frantz Fanon's repetition of the moment of identification when the white child exclaims, "Look! A negro!" is an affirmation of the slave's difference. In Fanon, the acts of "looking" and "seeing" constitute a creationary passage where the black body is formed within the epistemological and structural apparatuses that must be harnessed and reinforced to keep the status quo.[21] Something similar happens when Parks, looking at the word 'slave,' sees therein the brutalized beings whose labor undergirds a place like Charlottesville. But Parks cannot reconcile his perception of the slave with the 'human.' He rationalizes that by replacing the 'slave' with the 'human,' he has somehow reclaimed, reinvented the slave as a human, and has done a public service. Instead of applauding Parks, we should instead put pressure on this reinvention.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb form of the word "invent" as to "come upon, find, discover." "Invent" can also mean to "devise something false or fictitious; to fabricate, feign, 'make up'" or to "originate, introduce, or bring into use formally or by authority." Invention is an agential right of the sovereign that is often assumed by those belonging to a dominant race within a global racial hierarchy that permits them to enact such inventions on subjugated race. With Parks' authorial imposition on the slave auction block through his revisioning practices, he reinvents by renaming the 'slave' as 'human.' He acts out the necessity to invent;

an impulse which at an earlier time was entwined with "discovery" as in when Columbus *discovers* the new world and proceeds to categorize indigenous people as "idolators," and the sixteenth-century invention of Man that was enabled by the parallel invention of what Sylvia Wynter refers to as "the untrue Other of the Christian self" or "Man's human Others."[22] These acts of invention continue to exist in various permutations—in the science that permitted and legalized slavery and colonialism, and most spectacularly in the murder of black people by the police in the United States.[23] Fundamental to these acts of invention is race, which is its own kind of invention. In interrogating the relationship between race and psychology, Hortense Spillers argues that ""race" is not *simply* a metaphor and nothing more; it is the outcome of politics."[24] Further, Spillers describes race as a "*complicated* figure" that "demonstrates the power and danger of difference, that sign and assigns difference as a way to situate social subjects."[25] If a system of race and its mutations did not exist, Spillers argues, then "we would need to invent them."[26] Invention thus becomes its own kind of division, one that distinguished between those who by their imagined and structurally enforced racial dominance act to 'discover' and shape those others. This divide is perhaps what Spillers alludes to when she says earlier in the same essay, ""race" is destiny in the world we have made." [27] In other words, race is an invention necessary to rationalize Western systems of domination and brutality. However, Parks' reinvention by reinforcing a liberal, color-blind gesture that, in asserting the equality of slaves with humans, fails to grapple with the true quality of racism and antiblackness. I focus on Allen and Parks action not to call them out or shame them. Rather their actions, I believe, are emblematic of the growing trend of Americans trying to grapple with becoming anti-racist without understanding the limitations and inadequacies of some of these practices and attempts.

The unintended, nonetheless provocative, result of his striking through ~~slave~~ was to authorize through inscription that the term 'slave' denotes something or someone other than 'human'. On the one hand, Parks unintentionally re-emphasizes that the 'slave' is distinct from, perhaps even excised from the category of the human—socially dead, subject to gratuitous violence, and natal alienated.[28] On the other hand, Parks assumes that being human is universal without considering the ways that black humanity, as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson puts it, "is burdened with the specter of abject animality" and thus "assimilation into the category of "universal humanity" should not be equated with black freedom."[29] The representational apparatus that Parks mobilizes attempts to thrust upon the enslaved a humanity from which they are always already excised. By canceling out and later replacing 'slave' with 'human,' Parks constricts to the past the conditions of the 'slave,' leaving only its trace in the "human." In other words, what Parks and Allen do not realize is that the human is not universally applicable.[30] At the site of the slave auction block the limits of representation means that 'human' can only act as a supplement to 'slave' because that site remains marked by slavery and its many afterlives.

The auction block is a site that denotes the "marketing" of black flesh, as Katherine McKittrick points out, and it is not restricted to a singular location.[31] It was not limited by any circumference, surface area, or monument. It is "a singular location that is shaped by, and shapes, multiple spatial differentiations."[32] Allen's two-year-long continuous return to the slave auction block culminated in the removal and replacement of the monument with one made by Parks. Recently, this sign has been replaced by another homemade plaque that strikes through with red ink the two mentions of 'slave' on a copy of the original plaque and replaces one with 'Human' and the other with "people." Thus, there is a presumed fixity of the auction block that Allen displays in his obsession with the fixed plaque of the slave auction block, especially since slaves were sold in both public and private contexts on varying forms and kinds of auction blocks.[33] As the visible marker of a form of exchange that could, in theory, have taken place anywhere, Allen concentrates on this marker of the past solely, instead of the many markers of the present that evidence the ongoing socio-economic exchange value that the state and its people place on black people's daily lives. In Charlottesville, as in other U.S. towns and cities, such markers include housing inequality, unequal access to health care, and school zoning practices that separate the wealthier, predominantly white neighborhoods from the working-class black ones.[34]

Conclusion

Another plaque has been erected across the street from where the slave auction block was located. It stands at eye level, less prominent than the monument of the confederate soldier erected by the Daughters of the Confederacy behind it, but more visible than the stone celebrating the three presidents from Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe. This new plaque, erected by the Equal Justice Initiative, an organization that memorializes victims of racial terror, marks the lynching of John Henry James, a black man who, in 1898, was falsely accused of assaulting a white woman. The plaque explains in great detail how John Henry James was taken away from Charlottesville and then escorted back to Charlottesville where he was lynched by a mob of white men who "riddled his body with bullets" and left him there for several hours while people cut off pieces of his body as souvenirs. I mention this to illustrate the limits in Parks and Allen's reinventions and reclamations at the site of the slave auction block. The auction block is but one instantiation of the places and spaces across cities like Charlottesville, where the black body remains bound by the logic of captivity and slavery. The city, the road, the bus stop, the trail, the airplane, the state, the country, and the world are all spaces constructed on the backs of blacks, where black-bodied people are constantly subject to the continuing violence of market-values and systems.

There is something here that exceeds the binaries of the 'slave' and 'human.'[35] The new representational paradigm that Parks and Allen attempt to force into being is already flawed by the impossibility of fixing slavery in any one

temporal or geographical locale. The reinvention practices that sought to replace 'slave' for 'human' is limited by its failure to interrogate the gap between representation and freedom. Perhaps it is this difficulty that Wynter diagnoses when she says that there is "no escape-hatch from the metaphysical burden of being black."[36]

Endnotes

I wish to thank Ethan Madarieta for guidance, encouragement, and engagement with the ideas and research that was integral to the development of this paper. I am also grateful to Tyrone S. Palmer, Mlondi Zondi, and Chris Eng for the suggestions that greatly improved this piece.

1. "'No harm intended:' County Resident Confesses to Taking Slave Auction Block." c-ville.com published on February 11th 2020
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., emphasis mine.
4. Huey Copeland, "Red, Black, and Blue: Huey Copeland Talks with Frank B. Wilderson III about The National Museum of African American History and Culture and The National Museum of the American Indian," *Artforum International* 56, no. 1 (2017), 13.
5. Wanda Rushing "After Charlottesville." Contexts: Understanding People in Their Social Worlds, vol. 17, no. 1 (2018), 16.
6. Ibid., 18.
7. The University of Virginia's Carter G. Woodson Institute of African-American and African Studies' *The Illusion of Progress* provides an extensive overview of Charlottesville's history and the history of slavery, Jim Crow, and the Confederate monument. This quotation and some of the ideas in this paper emerge from this resource. The resource can be found here: http://illusion.woodson.as.virginia.edu/index.html.
8. Robert Musil and Peter Wortsman, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*. New York: Archipelago Books, 2006, 64.
9. Jefferson calls for the scientific community to conduct tests on black people to ascertain his pseudo-scientific observations, saying, "To justify a general conclusion, requires many observations, even where the subject may be submitted to the Anatomical knife, to Optical glasses, to analysis by fire, or by solvents…" (85-7).
10. Jefferson had a long-standing relationship with Sally Hemings, who was enslaved in Monticello. Sally Hemings is believed to have negotiated with Jefferson for herself and freedom for her future children as a condition for her return from Paris to enslavement in Monticello. Monticello curated an exhibition on Hemings and the other enslaved families at Monticello. See https://www.monticello.org/sallyhemings/ for more on the life of Sally Hemings.
11. The Jefferson School is a historically significant space for black residents of Charlottesville. It was a segregated black school, and now houses the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center. It is a cultural, arts, and history center that preserves the history and legacy of the African-American community in Charlottesville.
12. I have personally been part of one of these tours when two white men in a car began honking their horns and yelling, "keep them up!". I have witnessed similar interruptions when driving or walking past the monuments while a tour was underway.
13. A good resource for understanding how slavery and its continuation sustains the dispossession of black people in Charlottesville is Dayna Bowen Matthew's "On Charlottesville" published in *Virginia Law Review*, vol. 105, no. 2 (2019), 269 -341.
14. Calvin Warren, "Black Time: Slavery, Metaphysics, and the logic of Wellness." *The Psychic Hold of Slavery: Legacies in American Expressive Culture*, ed. Soyica Diggs, et al. Rutgers University Press, 2016, 67.
15. Warren, "Black Time," 59.

16. Saidiya Hartman, "The Time of Slavery," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002), 759. This is akin to what David Marriott refers to as the "occult presence of racial slavery, nowhere but nevertheless everywhere, a dead time which never arrives and does not stop arriving, as though by arriving it never happened until it happens again, then it never happened." See David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007, xxi.
17. Hortense J. Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words." *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, 152-175.
18. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Corrected ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 144.
19. Gerasimos Kakoliris, "Writing as a Supplement: Jacques Derrida's Deconstructive Reading of Rousseau's Confessions." *Philosophy Study* 5, no. 6 (2015), 303.
20. Ibid., 305.
21. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008, 89-93.
22. See Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View." *Race, Discourse, and the Origins of the Americas: A New World View*. Ed. Hyatt, Vera Lawrence., Rex M. Nettleford, and Smithsonian Institution Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995. Also see David Scott, "Interview: The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism* 4, no. 2 (2000), 176.
23. In his testimony before the grand jury, Police Officer Darren Wilson, involved in the murder of Michael Brown, said that Brown looked monstrous like a demon because he was angry. See Grand Jury Vol. V (State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson) p. 225 http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1371222-wilson-testimony.html
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29. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*. Sexual Cultures. New York: New York University Press, 2020, 27.
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31. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
32. Ibid. 68.
33. Ibid. 71.
34. The New York Times articles, "'You Are Still Black': Charlottesville's Racial Divide Hinders Students," published on October 16th, 2018, sketches how unequal school zoning practices perpetuate inequality.
35. Jackson, *Becoming Human*, 28.
36. Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism," 173.

Invention as Ideological Reproduction

Ziyana Lategan

Taiye Selasi once wrote that "[Virgil] Abloh's blackness, as the possessive implies, *belongs* to Abloh. It is his possession, his invention, in so many ways a work—one of his works—of art."[1] According to Selasi's portrait, Virgil Abloh's blackness is dissimilar to 'black', the racial category constructed by the American racial schema, because it "rejects absolutes."[2] Abloh's blackness is not something that he can escape, but neither can he be reduced to it. In Selasi's retelling, Abloh opened his Spring/Summer 2019 collection show by sending seventeen black models down a Parisian runway in a world built on the cornerstone of beauty (read: whiteness). It need not be overstated that the world of high fashion necessarily relies on exclusivity (excluding as the conditional operation) to exist. Any determination of judgment occurs only by way of a very tightly coordinated elite at the core affording and withholding credibility. Decisions on the relevant and the beautiful are directly determined by what is excluded from these categories—'The Fashion World' would have no basis outside of this method of taste making. Abloh knows first-hand that in the world of fashion, "race is the elephant in the room,"[3] but he recognizes, simultaneously, that "part of the reason as to why I think I'm here is that I've accepted the reality and then been able to put it aside to get on with my work."[4]

Abloh is insisting, as Selasi has argued, on 'being both'—both black and not black. Considering Abloh's work, this is not only a case of code-switching as a mechanism of survival and success, or a double consciousness, although it certainly is that. Abloh tells us, "I'm a black kid, I identify with white kids, am I either? Maybe I'm somewhere in between."[5] The in-between is Abloh's playground, it is the philosophy behind his brand 'Off-White'[6] as "defining the grey area between black and white."[7] The middle space, the interstitial, the contradictory, the out of context, this is the birthplace of Abloh's creative vision. As 'the busiest man in fashion,' Abloh is known as a multi-hyphenate artist: designer-artist-engineer-architect-deejay-influencer. The orientation of the polymath allows for a traversing of boundaries, and a privileged access to various contexts with a wider range of tools and materials. Abloh is the newly conceived Renaissance Man. In this regard, his collaboration with the Musée du Louvre in a special exhibition honoring the life and work of Leonardo da Vinci on the 500th anniversary of da Vinci's death by designing a capsule wardrobe honoring the Renaissance artist, was especially fitting. When asked about his collaboration with the Louvre, Abloh referenced the multi-hyphenate

nature of da Vinci's practice as an inspiration, positioning himself too as something of a Renaissance man:

> It's a crucial part of my overall body of work to prove that any place, no matter how exclusive it seems, is accessible to everyone. That you can be interested in expressing yourself through more than one practice and that creativity does not have to be tied to just one discipline. I think that Leonardo da Vinci was maybe the first artist to live by that principle, and I am trying to as well.[8]

Abloh is known for his wide-ranging expertise and his capacity to use the tools of one field to tinker with the questions and problems of another. He also has the skill and wherewithal to apply this cross-pollination of ideas vertically—that is, to various strata within a field. The obvious example is the elevation of streetwear to the realm of luxury. Added to this is his unforgettable sold out opening for rapper and performer Travis Scott's 2017 Bird's Eye View Tour, when Abloh the DJ mixed Miles Davis' "So What" with the Migos.[9]

There is no doubt that Abloh is at the helm of the American cultural scene. In 2019, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago presented *Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech,"* the first major mid-career retrospective of Abloh's work. The exhibition traveled to Atlanta's High Museum of Art in November 2019 and was due to appear at the Institute for Contemporary Art Boston in July 2020. In 2017, Abloh collaborated with esteemed activist and artist Jenny Holzer for a show at Pitti Uomo in a politically charged intervention to highlight the plight of refugees. Notably, the invitation to the show took the form of an orange T-shirt bearing the instructions for how to put on a life vest, and a line taken from an Iranian writer who fled for Europe, Omid Shams, "I WILL NEVER FORGIVE THE OCEAN" in capitalized Helvetica typeface between quotation marks.[10] In 2018, Abloh secured the position of artistic director of Louis Vuitton's men's division. Abloh has collaborated with major corporations like Nike, the European furniture brand Ikea, the bottled water company Evian, the global 'humanitarian' aid organization UNICEF, to name a few. In 2018, Abloh was declared one of Time's 100 most influential people, acquiring a profile entry by artist and collaborator, Takashi Murakami.[11] Abloh was also responsible for Serena Williams' get-up in her Nike x Abloh gear for the French Open a year ago. At this stage of his career, Abloh has acquired every necessary co-sign in almost every field of cultural expression.

At first glance, it appears to be a remarkable feat: to overcome all manner of limit, and find therein a multitude of contradictory spaces, each a container for a boundless and infinite creative potential. Is this not the absolute freedom, the opening up required for creating, for a true unfettered imaginative exploration? This is a space of invention, of making the world, of making oneself, of *being*.

Here there is no limit.

Except the one real limit that must constantly be "set aside".

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In a postmodern moment where everything seems to be overcome by a multitude of things expressing no overall unity, it would be difficult to maintain that *all* difference is contradiction.[12] But let us posit that there is a graded scale of difference, and after having crossed some threshold of distinctness, difference becomes openly contradictory. The weakest difference, according to Badiou, is simply the difference between a thing and itself in a different place, at its most elementary, the space between something and itself.[13] This level of difference is everywhere in Abloh's work in his reference to the readymade, the copy-paste methodology characteristic of internet culture. We could argue that the weakest difference is not weak at all, since the placing of an object in a different context produces an alienation from this context, and this alienation, according to Arthur Jafa, "produces a very particular kind of energy,"[14] that Marcel Duchamp was able to understand. Abloh has credited his use of the readymade object (editing it only 3-5%) to Duchamp in an unsurprising referential gesture given that Duchamp's readymades are themselves taken from the introduction of the ready-to-wear garment in fashion. As per Jafa's note, the black body is the object-out-of-place. Out of context everywhere. Seventeen black bodies on a Parisian runway cannot be a testament to black-as-beautiful appreciated by a changing and more open-minded consumer class, as much as it is a testament to the violence of placement, placing objects in contexts in which they are necessarily and conspicuously out of place. Unbeknownst to Abloh, these bodies must remain outside of this world if their appearances in it are to be remarkable.

The idea that one need to have an appreciation for the contradictory in order to exist in today's world is an avowed position Abloh adopted, in part at least, from Rem Koolhaas.[15] Given Abloh's playfulness, and his injunction to "question everything," Michael Rock has argued that Abloh's method is primarily dialectical. Rock writes, "if the dialectic, then, is not a formula but a method of study, the simple fact of Abloh becomes a way to understand the interrelationships and contradictions that face contemporary design."[16] Rock keeps pushing his hopeful dialectical materialist line, going so far as to splatter Abloh with a Soviet crimson:

> A dialectical method should lead to a new synthetic practice, the goal of which is not interpretation but change: resolving of dialectic opposition results in tangible advancement. Quantitative change leads, over time, to qualitative change—changing *things* will eventually alter states of consciousness.[17]

For anyone in Abloh's position, the world appears as a totality comprising multivalent interrelated forces that are constantly shifting, a world that Abloh is indubitably a reflection of. Abloh speaks of the world of design as being a space without boundaries, where everyone has the capacity to think across and between disciplines, a design space that is the most democratic it has ever been; he says, "there's a tremendous amount of freedom right now, to be free and to design a better

world."[18] Abloh's contradictions never manage to rub up against one another in ways that show any signs of struggle. Accurately, there is a totality with a plenitude of contradictions, but for Abloh these contradictions require sitting in more than overcoming. What we are offered is a postmodern multitude of difference, simply an eclectic mix of things haphazardly bouncing off each other, from one idea to the next. He blurs rather than sharpens.

There is a weakest difference, but there is no upper limit to difference.[19] The weakest contradiction, the place of representation, is the extent of the meaning of contradiction in Abloh's lexicon—the pleasure derived from having your expectations subverted. An openly conflictual contradiction however can be understood as two things in relation, each one requiring the other in order to exist, but at the same time, destroying the other in its effort to affirm itself. This level of contradiction appears nowhere in Abloh's work, nor in his mode of criticism. Contradiction cannot be univocal if we concede to the complex structure of the whole—contradiction is "complexly-structurally-unevenly determined."[20] But for Abloh, it would seem that things are placed in opposition not by virtue of their contradictory nature (in some cases they certainly are antagonistically contradictory). Rather, they appear to be positioned as oppositional simply because they are distinct: purist vs tourist, black vs white, luxury vs streetwear. An invented sense of controversy resting on an abundance of imagined diversity, never determined by an already existing world of power relations that determine the degree of dominance that one aspect of a contradiction might have over another. Abloh clarifies:

> I'm throwing a Molotov cocktail at the temple, but in a non-antagonistic way. I'm not punk; I'm not trying to overthrow the temple. The Molotov cocktail is just being there after starting the race from the furthest position.[21]

Imagine yourself in the heat of the riot against the Master, a gasoline bomb floats mid-air slow motion above a sea of chaos. How could it ever be non-antagonistic?

Of his collaboration with Holzer, Abloh has stated that the "work is weighted. It's not just fashion for fashion's sake,"[22] appearing to make a commitment to *something*. Abloh's method of critique—to question everything—is illustrative of a larger concern. Today, criticism is incorporated into the capitalist ethic, monetized and weaponized, packaged and sold by celebrity intellectuals, academics, artists, themselves 'influencers' in a paid partnership with a system of personal branding and a constantly consuming audience with an insatiable appetite. Finally, everyone has a 'voice,' everyone can contribute to a debate, the social sphere has been democratized. Of course, there is no greater way to hide a totalitarian structure than behind its very opposite, the appearance of democracy. More than mere incorporation, criticism is foundational to the social body. This overproduction and proliferation of criticism is sanctioned and incentivized. The limits of what we can question, of how we can question, are thus important to investigate. We could not have wished for a more exemplary product of ideology in this ravenously unequal and increasingly totalitarian American cultural sphere—auto-criticism included—

than the multi-dimensional Virgil Abloh. Non-antagonistic critique is the brand that this age has engendered. It is when we think of ourselves as outside of ideology that we are most embedded in it.[23]

"That's why everyone is mesmerised by it [blackness]. And it's not anti-capitalist or pro-capitalist, it exists outside the logic of capitalism."[24]

Power, in its rapacious, omnipotent, global incarnation, determines its opposition just as much as it determines its outside. The outsideness of blackness, its inexistence, is the possibility condition. The primary contradiction is repeatedly repressed. Misrecognition of the outside as a free space of creativity and invention, instead of as a part of the most fundamental contradiction in the socio-historical moment, ie. race, is precisely to avoid—or render impossible—a *concrete analysis of concrete conditions*. But how is it possible to think a new world from inside this one, when our inventions, like our bodies, are theirs?

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What of the garments? The most notable Off-White garments are immensely interesting. Many garments are presented as unfinished products in order to welcome the user into the design process or to reveal the process of design making. An Off-White leather purse includes a broken circle printed on it, with the instructions *cut here*, but the cut remains unmade. The design incorporates the shifters of the 'sewing program' into the final product. The shifter in this instance is a code usually employed as the transitional language mediating the movement from the technological garment to the iconic garment, "situated midway between the making of the garment and its being, between its origin and its form, its technology and its signification."[25] In this instance the transitional language is printed on the garment, no longer used for its traditional transitionary function, in its new placement it acts as part of the form. The rearrangement of codes offers us a backstage view of the process of making, the purse is both what it is and what it should become. The artifact no longer hides anything from us, we are seemingly presented with reality *as such*. Again, the veil is removed, we are meant to have escaped the trappings of ideology that obscure the real nature of the way things are really made. But the shift in shifters hides more than it reveals—more sinister than the concealment of the social relations of production found in the finished commodity, the unfinished commodity conceals even further its act of concealment.

Other Off-White garments are recognizable because they appear uncannily generic. The famous Off-White dress is a plain black mid-calf long-sleeved skewed neckline dress with the world "DRESS" printed vertically, in Helvetica along the front edge. On first sight, the garment itself might strike you as unremarkable. Deliberately so. A typical Off-White "QUOTES" garment is the combination of a minimalist designed clothing item plus its signifier in the neutral capitalized Helvetica typography between quotation marks, a gesture emblematic of what Abloh would

term the "post postmodern." The unit operates both in a world of garment design and construction, as well as a syntactic world of language, a heavily textual component forms part of the technological structure of the garment.[26] Taken as a whole, the item itself mimics a Saussurean sign: for every signified, its signifier.

The sign, displayed as the garment, calls to attention the arbitrariness of language. Abloh asks us: outside of the mechanisms of use and convention, what transcendental connection exists between the word "DRESS" and the actual dress bearing the word? There is none. This is the place where all critique commences, "why is something the way it is and not some other way? And who decides that it be this way?" Over and above the use of irony as a contemporary method of creative expression,[27] the questions leveled by the series of garments with "QUOTES" are provocative because they perform the first principle of all critique. Often the item bearing its signifier printed in capitalized Helvetica font does nothing more than call into question the construction of the sign, the recognition that our language is inherited and we are bereft of the capacity to point to their author, whose authority is nevertheless illegitimate. But the items of this category go beyond the function of mere semio-political critique. Abloh authorizes and invents a sign with pieces like the printed text "SCULPTURE" on a leather handbag. By way of explaining the use of quotation marks, Alec Leach noted that:

> when words are surrounded by speech marks, their validity is in question. By presenting words as citations, Abloh is taking them out of context, and questioning their seriousness. When he puts "Sculpture" on the side of a handbag, he's provoking the viewer. What's the difference between a handbag and a piece of art, really?[28]

The gesture cannot simply be dismissed as a clever use of irony. Instead, this work, much like the wallet bearing the signifier "FOR MONEY," is attempting to offer us not the possibility of considering the handbag as an example of a sculptural object for aesthetic reflection (because, as Leach asks, why not?), going even further, the signifier functions to redefine the concept itself. This designation of a new signifier onto something readymade, attached to a minimalist design, shifts the sign from being a garment in a collection, to reestablishing the ideal Platonic form of the garment, or at least its closest approximation. This is merely one instance of "where the alteration of the signifier occasions a conceptual change."[29] Stripped to an appearance of its most bare, Abloh materializes the Platonic ideal, he offers us a new ideal form itself. The practice of signification does the declarative work of deciding that the bag is "sculpture," declaring the dress to be *the* dress. In appearance, the prototype is only formal, presented as the original form, purely given, unencumbered by a "surplus expressivity."[30] The relationship is not merely that between the thing and its name, as Saussure is at pains to remind us, the sign is the unity of concept and sound-image. Accordingly, the combination of sound and thought "*produces a form, not a substance.*"[31] In a strange paradoxical performance, Abloh has invented a series of pure forms, rather than garments.

Does Abloh invent anything at all? If it can be said that Abloh has materialized form itself, in which all dresses are mere iterations of the ubiquitous immediately recognizable Off-White dress, and it is also the case that the universal ideal form in the social is merely a misnomer for the white bourgeois Euro-American ideal, then what is being created is no more than the reassertion of the dominant. Yet again, what appears as invention is no more than ideological reproduction.

"Pure form is, then, pure violence."[32]

Of course, the value of the sign is determined by its environment, and in a way, Abloh's critique lands equally on the conventional use of words, on the battle for the commonsense, as it could on the interdependent whole that order the signs, or make the series of signs sensible. Here, the whole is not limited to the linguistic system, but extends to the environment of creative design, the contemporary culture industry writ large, the governing relations of consumption-production-circulation and its necessary domain of democratized advertising. It is as if Abloh has given us ideology glasses (from Slavoj Žižek's treatment of the 1988 American Sci-Fi Horror *They Live*)[33] that should afford us the opportunity to see things as they really are, to make transparent the manipulation of the advertising industry that consistently exploits and creates our desires and fears. The trouble of course is that the glasses that let us see the raw of everyday life, are designed and manufactured by Louis Vuitton. Ideology critique is sanctioned and controlled by the machine of ideological reproduction.

Abloh pushes in the direction of producing a critical intervention that inevitably and clandestinely reinforces the dominant ideology. His denouncement of retail and commerce as unappealing is precisely an argument that appears to be against capitalist production and exchange, but still with an underlying and overriding impulse to participate in a consumerist culture.

Abloh has deliberately designed each of his flagship stores differently, "never duplicating the same idea,"[34] because, "I don't want stores…you should buy something if it speaks to you, otherwise you should go for the experience."[35] The constant bombardment of advertising has created a general resistance to being sold something, a sentiment Abloh has picked up on. This resistance coincidentally corresponds with the fact that there is nothing new to be sold in any case. In the "Experience Economy," what one is sold as novel is the 'vibe', because there are no longer any new *things*, only old things remixed, sampled, rearranged, laid bare, offset, and recontextualized in order to be presented as new—highly reliant on the "paradox as the driver of consumption."[36] Abloh describes the design of his Tokyo flagship as a space that,

> is not even a store whatsoever, it's an office called "Something & Associates"…post-it notes, water cooler, this, like, mid-century chair… what more does someone who's travelling these generic cities want, like especially if you're in Tokyo and your phone bill is too high and you're like cruising on

> airplane mode, you just want WiFi…you wanna find where you're going. That's what the hierarchy of the space is gonna be, the retail is gonna be pushed away.[37]

The space is designed as a stage for office work, the quintessential image of mind-numbing alienated labor associated with the notion of the 9-to-5 unproductive administrative rank and file, complete with a ticker constantly running displaying the live Tokyo stock exchange. There is no overt injunction to consume (the experience is the product), but the 'dead-end job' mise-en-scène is incentive enough to resist (through consumption) the alienation that this space typifies.

As an immanent critique of the use and interaction of symbols and signs, Abloh's making is also his undoing.

It is perhaps too cynical to note that Abloh's rise to the top of the cultural space occurs through his construction of language; his invention and play of signs. Admittedly, this might be too literal a reading of both Abloh and Lacan, which is not to say they ought not to be read together. To repeat Lacan, "everything emerges from the structure of the signifier."[38] It is precisely the signifiers that produce the subject, and at once, eradicates the subject, they are the conditions that make critique possible, and once made, nullify it. For Lacan, there exists a dialectical relationship between the subject and signification. Given that signification lands in the field of the Other, in the symbolic order, the "signifier is that which represents a subject for another signifier."[39] Abloh enters the symbolic order and is simultaneously neutralized by it. Again, repeating Lacan:

> The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject.[40]

The subject, for Lacan, is nothing if not alienated through language. Lacan's exclusive *vel* seems appropriate here. There can be no meaning where there is being, and no being where there is meaning. The famous "your money or your life" scenario is meant to illustrate the operation of this *or*, whereby if you choose the wrong option, you lose both, but the other option yields only one deprived of the other. The same option is lost in either outcome. The problem of meaning and being is a non-choice for everyone—you come to language as an escape from the Real.

For the figure of the black ~~subject~~, there is no option that yields *at least* one of the two options. All are already lost, always. Regardless of the altitude at the top of the culture industry, the pseudo-choice between meaning and being is already foreclosed for Abloh by virtue of his blackness. It is not that Abloh's entrance into the symbolic order through his use of the signifier effectively cancels the possibility of being, in the way that the universal Lacanian subject might come to be. Abloh

appears, but this apparition is the limit of his being in the world, of his making (in) the world. His deliberate employment of language is a desperate attempt at a choice, a desire for alienation and thus for subjecthood. The black ~~subject~~ must parody subjecthood of/in language in order to *simulate* the lack that constitutes the symbolic order. By instituting the lack, black "being" is presented as a perpetually unrealized potentiality, *as if* it were something that could have been grasped, *as if* the possibility of subjectivity existed at all. This effort mitigates the fact that the choice, however false, was never possible. If we accept the proposition that the black ~~subject~~ is the lack that props up the whole for white subjectivity, then the black object must invent a fiction of a lack (that is not also itself) in order to claim subjecthood. But there is nothing beneath blackness. Black is the nadir point. What monster must it imagine in order to be Subject?

Abloh's commodities in the collection of "QUOTES" have replaced the label Off-White such that the signifier *is* the logo. The quotation mark becomes "a device that allows him to claim anything as his own—to put his name on it—in the most overt way possible."[41] Whether the term Off-White appears on the garment, or whether the characteristic arrowed X emblematic of the brand is visible is less relevant than the appearance of these stylized signifiers. Having access to all the signifiers, any of them could suffice. One question we arrive at is to ask what becomes of language when every signifier is appropriated as a logo? Under conditions of late capitalism all of language is placed between scare quotes, with the white market as the ultimate Master. Words "lose their performative power,"[42] insofar as they are made subject to the commodity relation. Abloh can successfully stick signifiers onto commodities. Perhaps, in another register, it is only within the commodity relation that some signifiers are sensible at all.

Language coheres only where the black person is property.

Christina Sharpe's notion of dysgraphia[43] explains the impossibility of speaking of black people as human. It exposes the capacity for signification to hold – but only where the black is property, not person. For Sharpe, anagrammatical blackness—words and meanings that fail to take hold in and on black flesh—is the precondition for meaning making in general. The black 'person-as-property' is the condition or background for when meaning is communicable/sensible and when it is not. It is not then that signification can never stick, it is more that it can never stick if the black flesh is to be considered person. Terms can be made sensible, but they are the terms reserved for things. Unsurprisingly so, given that the black person is the instantiating commodity, the original item whose trade is essential for the entire sphere of exchange. As property/commodity, meaning can be afforded, removed, altered according to consumptive patterns and the play of signification. This is precisely the prize of property. Abloh's invention of signs remains in the realm of property, especially in the context of a cultural moment in which, "the values of the corporate are woven into the corporeal"[44] The multi-hyphenate phenomena that is

Virgil Abloh has not managed, despite every conceivable attempt, to escape objecthood. In the obvious sense this is by virtue of being black in the world, but less conspicuously because of what it means, in the most post-racial register, to be a "creative director":

> Creative directors not only guide the work that happens under their command, they also stand as an embodiment of the brand itself. In the most advanced cases, the brand is inseparable from the identity of the creative director…[45]

For those who have the means to buy the work, and for those millions of youths following the idea, the fact of Abloh's blackness and the controversy it ignites is built into the purchase. The attempt to rid oneself of objecthood has been collapsed again into something for sale. The consumer market, mostly white and now fashionably enlightened and liberal by decree, will consume whatever cutting edge design or process Abloh offers. The commodity is always fetishized. The complexity of Abloh's life and work—that he belongs to no culture except the culture of consumerism, that his work is produced by the internet for the internet, that he was catapulted to the top of Louis Vuitton without attending fashion school, that he is black sans attitude—is all included in the price of any one garment or artwork. Creative directors "don't deal in things, or not only in things, but in the stories that surround commodities that have become essential grease in the machinery of today's social media-fueled form of commerce."[46] Black creatives count as commodities, and their stories are currency—a core element in the white buying experience since modern slavery.

"Through what agency (volition? will?) does a Slave entify the signifier? Which is to ask, can there be such a thing as a narcissistic Slave?"[47]

Endnotes

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Blackness: N'est Pas?

David Marriott

Exergue

Fanon: "le Noir n'est pas un homme."[1] And this other text, by Pierre Macherey, from an essay on Althusser and Fanon: Is not the racially interpellated subject "the spokesperson or the echo of a remark of which *he is not*, himself, the author, and which does not come out of his mouth in a spontaneous fashion, but which has been dictated by another voice, a voice that remains silent?"[2]

We have yet to understand the being that is not, whereby it is the echo of a silence that cannot be communicated except through gaps—ruptures—in language; to recover the moment of its silence, before it can be established in the realm of being, before it is bleached white by ontology or representation. We must try to hear, within this silence, the yet to be understood experience of blackness, in order to pose the question of its being anew, before its reading can crystallize around the question of what it is, or, as Fanon conceives of it, is not, and the question of whether blackness should ever be considered a conventional form of humanism. To describe this experience of non-being, this echoing which turns ontology on its head, as a voice speaking without authorship, without origin, and as though a voice overheard, is to know that blackness cannot be uttered without at once being echoed by a voice that is not: n'est pas.

This is doubtless more than a question of reading. To explore it we must renounce the usual methods of psychoanalysis or philosophy, and we must never allow ourselves to be guided by what we may know of being (whether as an unasked question or as an unknowingness somehow unaccounted for or disavowed). None of the concepts of phenomenology, even and especially in the implicit sense of intentionality, consciousness, or affect, must be allowed to exert an organizing role. What is imperative is the gesture that attends to the undecidability of what blackness is, and not the 'science' that reads it as invariably a question of force, power, ideology and violence (and I would add to that: identity, desire, and faith). What is originary—in Fanon's phrasing of this is not—is the caesura that establishes the distance between humanism and the difficulty of defining blackness as personhood in general; perhaps this is why Fanon prefers other terms such as persona or mask; as for the hold exerted by ontology upon the being of the black in order to wrest from it its truth as non-reason, criminality, pathology or excess, one might say that undecidability characterizes these debates insofar as the meaning of blackness derives from this caesura from the start. We must therefore speak of this initial n'est pas without assuming the possibility of a judgment, or a right to distinction; we

must speak of blackness as neither type nor emblem, neither law nor resemblance, and we must leave in abeyance everything that could figure it as a definitive conclusion, or as a literal truth; we must speak of this n'est pas, of this silence set, of this void instituted between humanism and the limits of the human, without ever relying on the fantasy of 'speaking' or 'representing' what blackness is or claims to be.

Then, and then only, will we be able to understand why blackness poses a question that has yet to be formulated, and for which similarly there is still no answer. In fact, I would suggest that the one thing that will keep us from understanding the status of blackness is inherent to blackness itself. To explain why let me briefly turn to the ambiguous ways in which blackness has been read by philosophy, or a certain philosophy; a reading that is, in a very originary and very violent way, unable to pose, let alone answer, what it is that makes blackness both black *and* undecidable. Here silence and speech, being and non-being are inextricably involved: inseparable since they are not yet distinguished, but are nevertheless misrecognized each as the other, the one in relation to the other, in the undecidable exchange that separates them and that allows neither knowledge nor testimony to prevail.

I.

I began with the notion that the subject is the echo of that which it is not. There is nothing unique or obscure in this point of view, rather it has become something of a truism to say that the subject is always inscribed, implicated by what it assays; or, to be a subject is to be subjected by what is thereby engraved (by ideology or discourse). However, not everyone becomes a subject in the same way. This apparently common-sense point is what motivates Pierre Macherey's critique of Althusser and his notion of interpellation. Where, Macherey claims, in the classical scene of interpellation, the question posed by the enigmatic call [*appel*] of ideology is understood by all because, on the level of language, *each is spoken by his or her place in language*, and each is sequestered by what is sayable; in other words, in society, each is subject to the Other's language, and to speak is to be constituted by a subjection, which at best might justify Althusser's claim, as Macherey presents it, that in being hailed (by a hey you!) we all turn around [*retourné*] in exactly the same way. But what this scene perhaps overlooks is how we are so very differently *determined* by the situations we find ourselves in. In Macherey's account of the person of color, for example, he poses three challenges to the Althusserian formula:

> (i) for the subject who is *made to be* black there is "the feeling of not being a subject like the others, but a subject with something added, or perhaps we should say something missing"; accordingly this subject "is not [*n'est pas*], like the one of whom Althusser speaks, a turned subject [*un subject*

> *retourné*], but a doubled subject, who is divided between an *I* and this *more (or less) which cannot be recognized or connoted as such* (Macherey, 14, 18);
>
> (ii) whereas the Althusserian formula of subjection "draws its efficacy from its purely verbal character: it is projected from behind, from a source systematically concealed from sight," the subject of color "is constituted as such in the order of the visible, in plain sight, so to speak, and this changes everything"; it is an actual encounter "between two intersecting gazes" (Macherey, 14, 15);
>
> (iii) as such, one does not become a subject of color "except by entering into a relation [*rapport*] with others"; a situation which, because it unfolds in plain sight, "brings consciousness into the foreground and presupposes no reference to an unconscious [in contrast to Althusser who famously compares ideology to the unconscious]." (Macherey, 15, 16)

In all three instances, Macherey thinks that Althusser is right to say that the positioning of the subject by ideology is not delusory or imposed, but he thinks that this does not justify Althusser's move to a notion of interpellation that "isolates the one who receives it, suspending the relations that he or she might entertain with other people," and merely because we are all considered to be subjected in exactly the same way (Macherey, 16).[3] In other words, each is refracted differently in the other's language according to the qualities of its otherness; and the *retourné* barely suffices as an account of social differences. In both cases 1 and 2, Macherey thinks that the iconic "Tiens un nègre!" [Look, a nigger!"] episode from Frantz Fanon's 1952 text, *Peau noire, masques blancs* offers a differing account of subjectivation, and that his extrapolation of it brings it much closer "to the data of lived experience": more especially in case 2, Macherey's notion of an actual encounter "in plain sight" is supposed to show that there is no turning-around scenario for the black subject but a traumatizing encounter with a "gaze that fixes him" (Macherey, 15); case 3, which Macherey thinks comes closest to Fanon's supposed turn to a phenomenology of lived experience, is more troublesome and is described as follows:

> What first strikes us in this exposition is how it underscores the cumulative nature of the process by which is installed—in the mind of someone who, here, says 'I'—the feeling of not being a subject like the others, but a subject with something added, or perhaps we should say something missing, since the addition in question is color, a characteristic with negative connotations, the absence of colorlessness: we begin with an observation, tied to the intervention of an external stimulus, an onlooker's gaze on his body and his skin, an observation that exhibits an objective status from the outset; there then develops, in the mind of the one undergoing this test, a growing psychic tension leading from amusement, which is a form of acceptance, to the feeling that something unacceptable is happening, something strictly unbearable, at least under normal conditions. (Macherey, 14)

Whatever the virtues of Macherey's general construal of Althusser's theory (we will return to that question in a moment), it seems fairly clear that he has not at all grasped Fanon's main argument in *Peau noire, masques blancs* concerning *le vécue du Noir*. This may be because, just as Althusser's account of ideology has to be understood, I am suggesting, on the basis of the universality of the "linguistic or symbolic order," so Fanon's own thinking of the subject who is made *nègre*, which we shall soon see is also indebted to a radical rereading of Sartre, also has to be understood on the basis of his earlier treatment of an apparently quite different account of *subjectivation* to which Macherey rather surprisingly never refers in these contexts, that of the moment when Fanon says ideology speaks through the black subject, namely the *feeling* of being on one's guard before any actual racist encounter, and one, moreover, that he takes as proof of how one has already been unconsciously determined by the ideology of negrophobia. "How can we explain, for example, that a black guy who has passed his baccalaureate and arrives at the Sorbonne to study for his degree in philosophy is already on his guard before there is the sign of any conflict?" (Fanon, 123). What Fanon puts forward here is in fact very similar to Althusser: the encounter with "Tiens, un nègre!" is unbearable, not because it is actually lived, but because it is already the result of a truly enigmatic interpellation in which the signifier (and not the sign nor the gaze) acts as the unconscious confirmation and reminder that one is already racially subjected. Thus, what is traumatizing is not the word that paints an image of the real and that serves to discipline the subject into racial difference, but the identification that makes the sign into an unconsciously internal referential effect that blackens (via a kind of hallucinated perception) language, being, world. The former acts as a confirmation, so to speak, that one was already subjected by the latter; meaning that its enigmatic meaning is already in me. And just as the "tiens" is all the more intensely received because its meaning is doubly impenetrable, its meaning (without being disclosed) is the discovery of an affect that is neither *in* language nor *outside* it.

In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, this earlier treatment occurs in the discussion of Hegel's account of being in the famously obscure opening section of chapter 5, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" (and which comes just after the iconic "tiens" episode).

> There is in fact a "being for other," as described by Hegel, but any ontology is made impossible in a colonized and acculturated society. Apparently, those who have written on the subject have not taken this sufficiently into consideration. In the weltanschauung of a colonized people, there is an impurity or a flaw that prohibits any ontological explanation. (Fanon, 89-90)

Fanon has shown that Hegel's account of being for others [*fur sicht, l'être pour l'autre*] depends on a view of self-consciousness centered on recognition, but that every

ontology is made unattainable in the colony, for "there is an impurity, a flaw, that prohibits any ontological explanation." What is this impurity that places me *outside* of myself, but that is also a means of self-knowing? And how is one to account for this flaw that speaks from the side of the real (that is, the place where what is communicated is absent, prohibited)? This account of ontology as centered on prohibition is, according to Macherey, complicated by Fanon's own treatment of "the limit that speculation on the subject of being qua being encounters," that is to say, when it encounters a being that is also "being qua not-being [*être en tant qu'on n'est pas*], which is not the same thing at all" (Macherey, 16), but even that more complex account, in Macherey's view, presupposes a being that "teems with the unthought and the unsaid" (and of which Sartre's notion of a *néant de son propre être*, mentioned in *Peau noire, masques blancs* and of course in many other places by Fanon, and explicitly linked by him to a desire not to be), is a telling example. Macherey uses this account to underscore the point that racial difference has no universal equivalent. But Fanon's critique of ontology—of which the "tiens" episode is a key illustration—suggests that there is a difference *within* the very category of difference which cannot be represented by or reproduced *as* difference even if we thenceforth read it as what results directly from the discovery of racial difference. Fanon's extremely subtle point is that blackness does not have a language of its own, or: what it reproduces, what it utters, is a ventriloquy (in the proper sense of the term) that *speaks by itself*: in other words, contrary to the notion of interpellation, blackness has no articulation, for even its difference is borrowed; the result is a language whose idiom is that of a *n'est pas*. The *n'est pas*, certainly, is a very paradoxical object: without figure, without oppositional term, without remainder. In short, it is *what has always been said*, but also what interrupts *being-said*: it is essentially what remains in place, by being out of place: like a corpse that *corpses*.[4] In *Peau noire, masque blancs*, the problem of this *n'est pas*—the problem of situating the non-being of the black—is ontological rather than ideological, then, not because it starts from the problem of how people are subjectivated by their interpellation, but how certain subjects have to assume a being that is not in order to be recognized as subjects.[5] In brief, non-being is not the same for everyone and, in fact, the being that is made not to be (*n'est pas)* is not entirely a question of ontology (and so is different from Sartre's *néant* or *rien*). The placement of this *n'est pas* within a theory of ideology is therefore designed to solve a theoretical problem. That problem is not simply that of an unsaid (in Macherey's language), but refers to the effects of a prohibition that is maintained in being and is reproduced as a non-being that blackens. It is a problem that Fanon, in his early work, primarily engages via Sartre—not to say Freud and Hegel—and which has to be understood on the basis of his treatment of the moment at which the black understands that it is also *nègre*, or perhaps was always already *nègre*, a moment that Fanon puts foreword as belated, namely *nachträglich*. Or, the discovery of one's racial difference is always a belated discovery.

In *peau noire, masques blancs,* Fanon suggests that the drift of Sartre's demonstration—in *L'Être et le néant*, *Orphée Noir*, and a host of other texts—in fact underscores why ontology, and therefore phenomenology, is unable to think this black deficiency of being, its impurity, and precisely at the point where its prohibition introduces a more menacing untimeliness (and of which it could be said that blackness is *nachträglich* to even Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit*) and in a way that complicates how Sartre understands the relation between consciousness and being:

> For once this friend, this born Hegelian, had forgotten that consciousness needs to get lost in the night of the absolute, the only condition for attaining self-consciousness. To counter rationalism he recalled the negative side, but he forgot that this negativity draws its value from a virtually substantial absoluity [*absoluité*]. Consciousness committed to experience knows nothing, has to know nothing, of the essence and determination of its being. (Fanon, 112-113)

What I want to argue here is that what makes blackness both absolute and virtual is also what makes it incomprehensible to both reason and ontology as traditionally understood (by which I mean: the white rhetoric of universality). Let us briefly consider why. In *L'Être et le néant*, first published in 1943, Sartre argues that: as soon as we admit that for being to appear there has to be a corresponding state of consciousness, or that being in-itself (*an-sich*) or rather within-itself (*in-sich*) does not appear on its own, we must also accept that the being that appears presupposes something that is non-present and non-evident and that is its actual ontic foundation.[6] So if being is only as appearing (as in phenomenology) *for* somebody, which is to say for a subject, that appearance must therefore be ontically grounded in something that is outside itself before it can be determined for a subject. The priority of being over appearance is thus deduced not from the side of the object—which for Sartre is transcendent to our experiences of it—but from a subject (or self) consciousness which is characterized as being entirely apparent to itself, and which is nothing more than its intentionality. Whatever the phenomenological precision of this argument, or what it means to have a self-consciousness, for Sartre self-consciousness has no content in or through itself, all content must be given it from the outside. More, it is a "non-substantial absolute," once again, and this should not come as a surprise, because "it exists only to the degree to which it appears," and because "it is total emptiness (since the entire world is outside it)" (Sartre, 17). Since, then, self-consciousness is empty, insubstantial, a non-being, a *néant*, that is ontically, transitively dependent on being, it is always in an intentional relation to what carries it, namely, the *en-soi* that is identical to and completely filled by itself, and that has no emptiness or internal division. Rhetorically, there is no attempt here to go from the language of ontology to that of racial difference. And

yet, in those texts in which the question of racial difference is explicit, Sartre seems to present racial self-awareness as either an escape from self-consciousness (that he describes as irreal) or as the embrace of race as a quasi-objective essence (that he describes as a deluded self-objectification). In both instances, the subject intentionally denies (or inauthentically refuses) its own being. However, as the citation from Fanon suggests, what these two examples fail to grasp and what Sartre forgets (in his turn to phenomenology) is the extent to which the subject who refuses to be black is never able to escape the negrophobic effect of that refusal on his or her psyche, so that the response to interpellation is not the feigned escaping or embrace of difference, but the sudden disclosedness (what Heidegger calls *Erschlossenheit*) of an *en-soi* that is paradoxically full of its own non-being, and is overwhelmed by all the *négatités* that come with it: shame, despair, and guilt, that is to say, all those feelings that leave a residue and that cannot simply be negated at the level of consciousness. This is what Fanon means when he says that the black subject remains haunted by a virtually substantial absoluity, for it is made to empty itself of everything absolute, or transcendental. In a word, blackness cannot know itself eidetically as spirit. In going on to say, after reaffirming that consciousness is dependent on being, that the black has no actuality of being but also no possibility as being, Fanon is making the appearance of this *n'est pas* into a fundamental challenge to ontology. Blackness becomes an absoluity that can only affirm itself as a *n'est pas* (and consequently as a forbidden possibility), because its "*être été*" (being made-to-be) only appears insofar as it is not, and as something less than a *rien* but never quite a *néant*. But this non-being is not the subject's own. "[T]his reconsideration of myself, this thematization, was not my idea," Fanon writes (Fanon, 92). As a matter of fact, the black is the subject who allows non-being to appear—it assumes it as its essence, and its way of being is being-made-to-be-the-*en-soi*-that-is-not (*n'est pas*); it is the *être été* that sees itself as a *n'est pas*: where then is its contradiction, where is its impurity?

To answer, we must, despite the epistemological paradox of the object, say: blackness is the expression of its perpetual effacement. Silence, or *retournement*, is denied us, not because our speech has no status, or we don't speak clearly or well, but because *all speech is on the side of a racial law*. To speak black or white is still to have a role imposed: either that of a shimmer or blemish added on, or that of an obligatory delusion that is also a failure to speak at all. Or else the speaker is hampered by what is said without being said, what is absent: the idiom of a law that simply communicates the *ban* (the affective politics) of negrophobia: in this case what is unconsciously said can only be expressed, so to speak, by its effect: the effect of a being that is excruciated. This is why any lapsus in speech is irreversible: a white idiom can only show a black delivery as impure, bad, comedic; as a failure to speak "properly," and will either be corrected or perfected by a judgement that is likened to a condemnation. Anyone preparing to speak "Parisian" (among other blacks) will, then, be conscious that each word articulates a *n'est pas* that is always

on the side of a racial law. But not being is not being nothing, and deficiency is not a negation, but rather contains an affirmation of another sort in itself. A deficiency of being may be indistinguishable from the fault that empties it, but this deficiency does not exclude the power, the affect, of absoluity that is the faultline of its very structure (a point that is as hard to express as it is grasp). In other words, what has been or can be produced as *nègre* also raises, in a very profound way, what counts as subjection.

It can now be seen that what Sartre has forgotten is what it means to *be* a *nègre* independently of any intent or desire we may have. This apparently negative virtually substantial absoluity, then, would be in fact the positive condition of the impurity or flaw by which the black knows nothing (*n'est pas*) of the essences and determinations of its being. For our purposes here, the essential part of the analysis is that it implies that ontology has itself forgotten how being-for-others is structured by this *n'est pas*, and that its apparent simplicity and self-identity harbors a black alterity that means both that it has an absoluity (it is not simply an escape as Sartre has it) *and* that that absoluity is not simply that of an intersubjective unsaid—that is, the anonymous voice of ideology speaking through the subject—but an enigmatic prohibition: on Fanon's reading, *the black is made to be non-being rather than an inauthentic failure to be*, the *être en tant qu'on n'est pas* is not just the presencing of a deficiency but involves something more like the flickering of a warning sign, an interdiction, an essential ban or exclusion, however evanescent or fleeting. And this being-made-to-be, which explicitly alludes to Sartre's "être éte" in *L'Être et le néant*, appears to have a characteristic that could be described as the ideological response, in culture, to the very possibility of black desire (Sartre, 22n14). (This could be linked to other figures in Fanon of a disallowed or forbidden path, such as the "prohibitions and barriers" in *Les Damnés de la Terre* and the more general figure of zones and blockades).[7] The black is stuck, paralyzed before a prohibited path not because it is emptied of *être en-soi*, but because, contrary to Sartre, blackness cannot be made into a ground of being and so guarded, fenced off, as a new epistemic ground. Blackness, in other words, is not encountered on the way to being, like an obstacle, but rather in what lies beyond it: the deficiency by which it finds itself lacerated, severed, scattered (which is what passes for the black experience of the world). And this allows him further to play on the fact that in French, the word *être* is not just a transitive verb in the present tense but also can be used in the passive voice, which Macherey has not succeeded in grasping in his more simple account of ideology. This element of non-being in the analysis (and Fanon is certainly crediting Sartre with this insight, albeit one that also involves an element of blindness) would then bespeak an essential limit for how Fanon understands Sartre's phenomenology in its efforts to go to "intentionality" and would open onto what Fanon famously develops here and elsewhere as the evanescent structure of a *n'est pas*, which has to be thought of as more originary than either being or ideology. Although Fanon never to my knowledge makes the connection

explicit, this complication of the Hegelian notion of the *pour-soi* is of a piece with his own ambivalent fascination with Sartre's notion of nausea, as we shall see. And the sense that even if, for Sartre, it is through the subject that nothing (the *néant*) comes into the world, the black subject cannot "be its own nothing," for the thing that makes it into non-being does not belong to it, and is not its own doing, for it does not seek to determine itself as non-being (and thus as a *néant de son proper être*) but discovers that its non-being is outside of itself, and so beyond authenticity or intentionality. In other words, it is not enough to be ontically black to be consciously so, but nor is it enough to be interpellated *as* black to be unconsciously black in one's drives and desire.

Returning to *Peau noire, masques blancs* and leaving aside for now Fanon's initially enigmatic alignment in that text of blackness and ontology, of blackness and impossibility, let us try, the better to grasp what Macherey has wrong here, to understand the overall argumentative structure of Fanon's text (its reading of negrophobia as ideology). Fanon claims that negrophobia is endemic to the system and institutions of the colony and is itself grounded in a moment of inaugural violence that it cannot ever simply integrate or absorb. This claim is not simply an empirical or historical claim about actually existing systems or institutions (although the question of how the de facto violence of the colony becomes de jure, legitimated by a logic of racial sovereignty, is also at stake). This founding violence does indeed seem to have something of the character of the Althusserian version of interpellation, in that it is radically constitutive of the subject and thus marks a complete subjectivation in whose interruptive, decisive character we have been associating with the temporality of the "tiens" episode. But to capture this violent structure—the performative power of negrophobia—it is telling that Fanon's discourse comes up against its limit: it has to move away from both the language of phenomenology and that of psychoanalysis, to grasp the meaning of what he calls the *n'est pas*. To give just one example; it occurs after the introduction of the "*schema épidermique racial*": "I approached the other [*l'autre*]…and the other evanescent, hostile but not opaque, transparent, absent, disappeared. Nausea…" (Fanon, 90, 92, translation mine).

On the basis of this claim, Fanon will argue that this founding, evanescent or ungrounded violence does not simply disappear along with the (white) other who institutes it but that the trace of it remains as a kind of nausea. To the extent that what is thus instituted as *nègre* is not just a system of domination with its predictable outcomes (and Macherey concedes in all three of his types of case that negrophobia is not repressive in this sense), then the decision not to be *nègre*, in as much as this is ever a decision, always takes place in the nauseating recollection, as it were, of that ungrounded foundational moment. Insofar as we are dealing with a prohibition that is itself absent, evanescent, decisions made in the name of freedom are then always in principle, however unknown in fact, imprisoned within the formal instituted framework of a racial law (what Fanon calls "imposition") within

which anti-blackness is judged and pronounced. Fanon gives this imprisoning a very strong characterization in terms of aporia, in that on this view *any* decision to not be black to some extent attests to an interdiction at the level of being: the White Man [*le Blanc*], he writes, "had no scruples about imprisoning me," which is the reason why the I here is not only outside of itself [*être-la*], but experiences itself as *the effect of a call that is nihilating*" (Fanon, 92). Every time that the subject hears the word *nègre*, every time that it tries to affect a correctly subsumed white example, according to a determinant judgement of what it *ought* (not) to be, it experiences this nausea by which the ego *hemorrhages* into an experience of aporia. This emptying out, this lessening: the terms converge on the concept of effacement in ways that remain to be understood, and that will force us to revise our understanding of Fanon's relation to Sartre, Marx, and Lacan.

Freedom, then (as opposed to resistance or complicity), always entails, however minimally, this moment of nausea in which negrophobia uncovers the vicissitudes of this *être-la*. Macherey would not deny this: indeed this is just where he thinks that Fanon (as opposed to Althusser) is right, but he thinks that nothing in the structure as laid out so far justifies what he presents as Fanon's refusal of the unconscious. After a further argument that attempts to show that negrophobia in general gives rise to a nausea that is certainly related to that described by Sartre in the context we are exploring, Fanon lists and discusses three aporias in the sense we have just given, and it is here that we will be able to understand the general logic of the *être-la* that Macherey is overlooking. Although all three of these aporias (which overlap to some extent, or perhaps can be thought of as redescribing one and the same impossibility from three slightly different angles, in terms of what Fanon calls the interdicted accomplishment of an infinite desuturation) are germane to the questions here, and the nearest Fanon comes actually to saying what the *être-la* is in the context of the third, it is actually in the first that the logic in question is most readily understood.

The first aporia, "an object among other objects," reveals how blackness is possessed by a cultural voice that is not its own: we can thus say that the appearance of the *nègre* is consequent to the white disappearance of the subject (its evanescence), and for there to have been a subject, there must have been something other than the subject for its 'being' to just disappear from the world – what, in a different context, Fanon calls the *existentiale* situation of vertigo and nausea. This much we have seen Macherey concede. On the other hand (this is what Macherey seems not to have grasped when he claims that for Fanon "one is never a subject pure and simple, or a subject in an absolute sense, but only ever a subject in a situation" (Macherey, 18)), the action or decision to not be a subject (or to be a subject condemned and judged as deficient) must nonetheless still have a relation to absoluity and thereby to a certain loss. Fanon describes the situation as follows:

> Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough

> edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out of the world put me back in the world. But just as I get to the other slope I stumble, and the Other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitude, the same way you fix a preparation with a dye. I lose my temper, demand an explanation . . . . Nothing doing. I explode. Here are the fragments put together by another me. (Fanon, 89)

The gaze that reifies or objectifies me must at one and the same time be the gaze that frees me from reification, and thus gives me back my world, yet without being one with or entirely consistent with the world, thus always to some extent contesting or suspending my access to the world. This means that the *I* that aspires to the world can never simply or confidently be *known* to be in it, on the one hand because of the desire that defines the decision as such (in its contentment and wretchedness) and on the other because the *I*'s belonging to the world will again be subject to the same aporia as that of the object. This means, says Fanon, that in a sense blackness has to invent, or more properly, reinvent the world as though for the first time in its discovery of it as lost (and each case is, *ex hypothesi*, a loss that is *already known*). This moment (however fraught) of reinvention then repeats, in however minimal a way, the founding violence of the exclusion itself, as already described. In short, for blackness to be in the world, it must, in its self-awareness, be both liberated and excluded: it must preserve itself as fixed or suspended in order to reinvent itself in each case, or reinvent itself as an affirmation in the free confirmation of its negrophobic principle. Each time it is fixed, each time it finds itself excluded by a white interpretation (narratives, values, reasoning), it also knows that only a white gaze can guarantee it absolutely. At least, if the gaze that guarantees it in no uncertain terms is also what censors, or nihilates it, then to be repeatedly seen by it, which always happens in part and according to the necessary iterability of negrophobia, is to be returned to being not as tragedy, but as a farce: but to that extent one will say of the black that he is purely free only if he doesn't confirm or refer to blackness or if, because he doesn't want to lose himself, if he suspends his decision, stops at the undecidable, but always violently resolved, that is to say, buried, dissimulated, repressed blackness of his being. Here the *être-la* is what establishes the call by which the being of the black is destined, or, more tellingly, learns to *become the being of its appearance* rather than the appearance of its being.

Macherey would perhaps say that this is just the kind of situation he is describing in his first case (i.e., the gaze as a logic of domination).[8] If that were so, then at the very least his criticism of Althusser would be unjustified because to that extent they would in fact be agreeing. But it seems as though they are not exactly saying the same thing: Macherey's description of "a specified subject, a normed subject, a subject for and under norms," which is supposed to capture the "(apparent) legitimacy" and the "(real) efficacy" of racist interpellation and despite its claim to be essentially a correction of Althusser, in fact systematically minimizes the

elements of complicity (already in the desire to be put back into the world), of violence and undecidability that are showing up in Fanon's account (Macherey, 19).

Indeed, it seems that the question of decision, what it establishes or makes happen (in the sense of being the enigmatic point of a pathological inability to decide), is the object of Fanon's second aporia. The point here (Fanon also formulates this argument in the wake of his polemical exchange with Sartre) is that for the black "to make myself known" (in the sense of being recognized, that is, as a consciousness that is aware of its freedom), there must be a recognition by others that "all I want is to be anonymous" (Fanon, 95, 96). In this sense, "anonymity" means a little more than not being noticed; it refers rather to a desire to be recognized as not *nègre* even though what is recognized as *nègre must* be a misrecognition, a situation in which the desire to go unrecognized by a misrecognition is always an *impossible* recognition. On the one hand, this involves a tension between being a subject pure and simple in the sense of being in a relation to others and the singularity of the situation that we have already laid out and that Fanon here redescribes as an undecidable "evanescence" between two contradictory but equally imperative injunctions (so a kind of double bind); to become white insofar as one is condemned as black but always in the awareness that one's whiteness is impossible, heterogeneous, and irreducible, and, on the other hand, something that seems just as pernicious and that the least one can say it is not made immediately perspicuous: thus, to be black means: embrace one's deficiency, its impurity and necessary disappearance as one's most singular possession. Fanon says that blackness is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous to what it means to be human, and what ought, and yet cannot be human, has to give itself up to the impossible decision to be while refusing-embracing its non-being. Without this vicious circle, he says, apparently repeating an earlier point, the decision not to be black would not be a decision and would amount to a negrophobic imposition. Throughout all of this fraught characterization Fanon comes back to the assertion that "the proof was there, implacable. My blackness was there, dense and undeniable. And it tormented me, pursued me, made me uneasy, and exasperated me" (Fanon, 96). The point is that if blackness is undeniable, to have the density of being to which we shall be increasingly attentive in what follows, then it must exceed or suspend not merely the generality of what it means to be a subject to which it nonetheless retains the relationship laid out in the first aporia but also the idea that a decision to be is something that is never simply done or made by a subject, in the sense that there would first be a subject in its self-identity and relative self-sufficiency, and that it would subsequently come to make (or suffer) a loss of being on the basis of that subjecthood. In a way that is certainly still Sartrean in its inspiration if not its details, Fanon will argue that a thinking based on the subject will be unable to account for blackness: even if one wanted to say that the subject was made black or that blackness happened to it, on Fanon's view the word and concept "subject" would severely block and limit that thought (just as earlier we were able to criticize Sartre's

subjectivist account of self-certainty). As often around these matters, Fanon is quite vehement: "I was not mistaken. It was hatred; I was hated, detested, and despised, not by my next-door neighbor or a close cousin, but by an entire race. (Fanon, 97-98) And: "Victory was playing cat and mouse; it was thumbing its nose at me. As the saying goes: now you see me, now you don't. . . . And in one sense, if I had to define myself I would say I am the one who waits" (Fanon, 99, translation mine).

Undecidability, then, seems at the very least to involve an appearance that also involves one's disappearance ("now you see me, now you don't"), and a belated awareness that one is hated in one's very being. To that extent, and contrary to the Sartrean account we were reading earlier, if the white subject is entirely characterized by its transparent emptiness (since the entire world is outside it), and to some extent is the consequence of what happens or befalls it as a simple event or contingency, for the black subject, as Fanon puts it, the world is already *there* (*être-la*), aversive, hostile, even hateful, and what befalls it is expected. This aspect too, which Fanon is again suggesting must be present, however minimally, in any decision (not) to be black (the decision not to be *nègre*, to use an idiom from Fanon that we will soon be focusing on), suggests an opacity that, in a word, blackens ego, cogito, and bodily schema. Further (and this aspect of Fanon's discussion seems entirely absent from Macherey, though not from Sartre), this trial or ordeal of undecidability is not simply a transient moment (thought of as an impasse in a Hegelian sense). The undecidability that I am (or perhaps, given what we have just said, the "it" that is hated, or that is added, *the it that is me*) that is at once seen and unseen, and once it has happened produces nausea, this *it* remains marked by undecidability, and according to a pervasive logic of a necessary alterity in which what is *être-la* is never simply *there*, or, more precisely, it is *not* an *il y a*. And it remains marked by undecidability in the mode of spectrality, which will, as we shall shortly see, be a crucial aspect of Fanon's thinking and one that will make his theory of subjectivation slightly different again from Althusser (and a fortiori Macherey's). The spectrality of black undecidability will remain with the question of what an assured self-certainty would mean for the being of the black (or even whether it ever has a real ground for questioning its appearing as black, for questioning what something is not the same thing as saying that it is). Certainly, the real must lend itself to a figuration, to a concept, but for Sartre the actuality of the *en-soi* is not affected by this appearing. For Fanon, on the other hand, the figure and concept of blackness introduces a schism which alters being; it is not present in itself, but refers to something that has been cut open and amputated; and, moreover, this hemorrhaging challenges not only the subject's consistency but its ontic presupposition as an existence. It is not so much a dependency on how being appears, but a realization that blackness reveals the being of an appearing dependence. "I am a slave not to the "idea" others have of me, but to my appearance," Fanon tells us (Fanon, 95). This is why it cannot be surmounted or sublated, but remains caught, lodged like a

ghost in an undecidable decision which it either blindly follows or affirms as the law of its existence.

After some remarks about how this situation reached in the first two aporias (something in you more than you, undecidability of the decision (not) to be black as coming from somewhere other than the subject, whose arrival or refusal I do not master or control) might lead to an accusation of madness or neurosis (which will again bring us back to Freud) and other remarks about a reluctance (if not an outright refusal) to align the sense of being "too late" said to be at work in these descriptions with the idea of racial difference, Fanon moves to his third aporia, which will explicitly bring us back to Freud but also suggest a way in which the Sartrean and Freudian versions of ontology cannot be separated as rapidly and cleanly as Macherey seems to think and needs to think in order to sustain his reading of Fanon's own interpellation.

The third aporia: "I wade in black irrationality, I am up to my neck in it, as a rational response to white irrationality," at first seems little more than an inversion of the adage (from the *Acts of the Apostles*) that we must meet unreason with reason. The reason that is unreason is thus the reason why I have turned to irrationality. For Fanon, this inversion ruptures the kind of ecstatic irrationality at play in Senghor's aesthetic theory of negritude and, most importantly, affects the relationship between jouissance and knowledge. Just as he comes up against something unreasoned in being-for others, Fanon realizes that the turn to black irrationality is also a symptom of the desire to make himself known: but the knowledge of what it means to be black in a certain sense comes before knowledge and blocks it. And even if it were possible to counter racist scientific knowledge with black poetic knowledge, that decision would still take the form of the irruptive *être-nègre* that he is trying better to understand. Hence Fanon's irritated, frustrated response to Sartre's "*Orphée Noir*," and the argument that blackness is in a transitive-transitory relation to historical knowledge, *as such*, and that it must always remain a finite moment of urgency and discovery, and that it cannot be the consequence or effect of a theoretical or historical knowledge, given that the latter is the outcome of a dialectic that precedes the distinction between reason and unreason, that *must* precede it. Having written on this elsewhere, I won't go into any detail here.[9] But Fanon's response: "So they were countering my irrationality with rationality, my rationality with the 'true rationality'" (Fanon, 111); recalls Fanon's discussion of *L'Être et le néant* that we described earlier: the call of ideology in Macherey's discussion of Althusser puts an end to any doubt the moment one is summoned, here speculation ceases and one's destiny is about to be decided. The difference here, however, has precisely to do with the quality of the urgency that Fanon ascribes to racial thinking: eschatological as it may be in a certain sense, as we shall see shortly, here the belief that race is a destiny does not seem to occur *at the end* of discussion or deliberation, nor even exactly *as an outcome* of such discussion and deliberation, but, through its intrinsic negrophobia, to cut short deliberation and discussion,

which are in principle irrelevant and which, however necessary they may be to the prospects of a reasoned response to blackness (and blackness is never simply a question of reason, says Fanon) are necessarily displaced by a phantasm whose existence is sui generis. And so it is not surprising that Fanon immediately invokes here not consciousness but indeed an "impulsiveness": negritude is the acting out of an "impulsive position," he writes, that is driven to see in blackness an *en-soi* that is complete or "immanent in itself," and precisely because it refuses to see or know how it is itself unreasoned, driven by the desire not to be (Fanon, 114). But this desire to make blackness into a moment of decision (in the sense of discovery), to make it into an *is* rather than an is not, is always preceded (structurally and epistemologically, says Fanon) by the moment of negrophobic interpellation. This is why, as Fanon points out, the decision to present blackness as an *en-soi* is never a question of rationality (*verständlichkeit*) or negation, but is the result of a subjectivation that is always and everywhere the imperfect, imcomplete imbrication of one's being. Or, as Fanon puts it, "Où me situer? Ou, si vous préférez: où me fourrer?" (Fanon, 91) Where do I fit in? Or, if you prefer: where should I put myself? (Fanon, 93, translation mine).

II.

> Irony as the negative is the way; it is not the truth but the way.
> —Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*

This questioning is in fact a constant one in Fanon, first appearing in his published work as the famous final sentence of *Peau noire, masques blancs*: "O my body, always make me a man who questions!" (Fanon, 206). The emphatic, exclamatory distinctions of Fanon's texts are often in tension with the precarious, even agonistic nature of what is being expressed, in as much as they concern the way that blackness is *denegated*, and that is more or less explicitly alluded to many times in Fanon's work, functioning as a kind of watchword or slogan but never once given a precise definition or a detailed reading. In *Pour La Révolution Africaine* (published in 1964 but based on articles from 1952–1961), for example, the same kind of emphatic, but precarious assertion expresses a harsh irony: "It thus seems that the West Indian, after the great white error, is now living in the great black mirage."[10] In the essay "West Indians and Africans," first published in *Esprit* in 1955, Fanon suggests a possible connection between irony and what he refers to as a "defense against neurosis," provoking him to state that, in the West Indies, irony (and incidentally the reference to the great black mirage returns us to the context of the third aporia and the racial-cultural politics of negritude—irony is in fact used to question the somewhat impassioned invocation of a negritude), is paradigmatic. In the essay, Fanon's reading of negritude, which does not mention explicitly his own earlier reading in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, though he does invoke irony as a kind

of dissimulation, helps us see how the three aporias presented separately in *Peau noire, masques blancs* are related in the general thought of an irony that is both psychoanalytic and historical (the resonance with Macherey's analysis of the *unsaid* in *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* (translated as *A Theory of Literary Production*) is something to which we shall return):

> Jankélévitch has shown that irony is one of the forms that good conscience assumes. It is true that in the West Indies irony is a mechanism of a defense against neurosis. A West Indian, in particular an intellectual who is no longer on the level of irony, discovers his Negritude. Thus, while in Europe irony protects against the existential anguish, in Martinique it protects against negritude. (*Towards*, 19)

The explicit invocation of irony as a defense against anguish and neurosis is clear here, but the idea that irony also names a dialectic of black history (in the Antilles, in Africa) may not be so obvious: so in the essay we find: "Until 1939 the West Indian lived, thought, dreamed (we have shown this in *Black Skin, White Masks*) composed poems, wrote novels exactly as a white man would have done"; but "in 1945 he [the West Indian] discovered himself to be not only black but a Negro [*Nègre*]," a discovery that came from the reading of Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Towards*, 26, 25). And again, in 1939 the West Indian "was continually recalling that he was not a Negro"; but "from 1945 on, the West Indian in France was continually to recall that he *was* a Negro" (*Towards*, 24-25). What happens between 1939 and 1945? Fanon cites two linked events: the publication, in 1939, of Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*; and the forced deployment in 1943 of ten thousand racist Vichy sailors in Martinique after the fall of France. According to Fanon, the confrontation with white racism forced Martinicans to analyze their metaphysical fabulations apropos of French imperialism, but it was Césaire's poetics, defined specifically as a *negritude*, which permitted them to ask the question: am I a *nègre*? A question that acted rather like a parabasis in that it interrupted and intruded upon the illusion of West Indian society and rhetoric; forcing them to rethink the strictly ideological relation between "being neither white nor Negro" (a class definition), and the function of such rhetoric when faced with the event or decision of negrophobia. We are then in the presence of two sign systems imbricated within each other; in the first, history is not so much a defense against irony as the most ironic of discourses; and in the second, negritude is the means by which an anti-black black racism can be expressed and denoted. Which is as much to say that the desire to be, or not to be *un nègre*, is always the denegation of what one actually is and a defense against what one appears to be but is not. The irony here has a very specific meaning, which the reference to Vladimir Jankélévitch's *L'Ironie* (1936) makes more complicated than it might at first appear. What is it that makes negritude an ironic poetics?: *negritude* is essentially the convergence of different signifieds in a single signifier according to which blackness is both excessive and subtractive, both

concept and unreason, both truth and pseudology. It is this specific element which, for my part, I shall call a *parabasis*: "parabasis is the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register," writes Paul de Man, which is also linked to an interruptive "intrusion" (as such, the word not only gives us a different way of thinking about the "*tiens*" passages, but also about Fanon's reading of them).[11] The oscillation between error and mirage would suggest that the parabasis is permanent in the sense given it by de Man in his reading of Schlegel: that the interruption—the interdiction—takes place successively, infinitely, so that we could say that *blackness is the permanent parabasis of an anti-black allegory*, and that irony refers to its necessary undoing and what, historically, links it to an economy of aberration: this is the logic of both the metaphysical fantasy (of blackness), as an excess that is infinitely subtractive, and a dialectic that is structured by enmity. "I mean, for example, that the enemy of the Negro is often not the white man but a man of his own color" (*Towards*, 17). What disrupts is, then, the disillusion that permanently blackens all irony. But there is no recuperation in terms of an historical dialectic, as we saw in Fanon's response to Sartre, for the great black hole is a mirage, and even irony cannot expose what it really is, for what it reveals is an enmity launched against one's own impossible reflection. And just as, when considered historically, blackness is a mirage, in the same way, when considered as irony, it reveals a negrophobia or—the same thing—a negritude that henceforth makes comprehensible an enmity of which irony, formed as a defense, is the most precarious, suspended, and interrupted of signs.

Simplifying greatly, it seems to me that where Macherey's sense of Althusserian interpellation seems to come primarily from an unequivocal, supposedly unironic account of being spoken, Fanon's reference to irony, or, if you prefer, black irony, which by its interruption and utter ambiguity gives one the impression that defense and enmity have changed names and even content, according to a metaphysics of intrusion, is where the said and the unsaid are, precisely, both allegories of the same (ghostly, traumatic) encounter with what is considered to be *nègre*. Let us consider these two oppositions.

Firstly, in the West Indies, the decision to *be* is always troubled by a desire that, we know, both idealizes and repels blackness, and so is unwilling and unable to decide between them, and so chooses neither. Irony offers an illusory escape from such indecision; whether this derives from a good conscience (Jankélévitch) or a bad conscience (Sartre), the refusal of apodictic certainty (the assertiveness of ideology), is not simply evasive, but nor is it resistant: Fanon accuses the black ironist of being *defensive*, that is to say, the failure to decide between content (truth) and form (appearance), or between white (message) and black (medium), gives rise, historically, to an aporia that cannot decide between illusion and error. I do not believe, as a matter of fact, that blackness can proceed without a certain undecidability as to its object (as we know, nothing is more resolutely elusive and paradoxical than the language of racial authenticity); nor do I believe that *le vécu noir*, heir

of a thousand anecdotes and fables, at once mythic, ideological, and stereotypic, can be divested of irony without the risk of further illusion. Hence Fanon's criticism of the metaphors by which West Indians express their superiority to Africans, for example, and the vision that subsists through them, that of a feeling of racial inferiority hidden behind the *nègre* as signifier. It is this argument, itself ironical, that explains why blackness is inevitably experienced as a permanent parabasis (I am referring here to the word *intrusion* rather than, say, imposition, or interpellation, and the trope by which it is communicated: the metaphor that makes blackness appear as a black hole, and the various invocations of a paradoxically repelling attraction, as an asymptote that famously touches on its own negation, but in a way that is always liminal, indecisive, because it refuses to know what it already knows, and will not verbalize the words, or the concepts, that would free it from such equivocation). Contrary to Jankélévitch, then, for whom irony reveals the truth behind illusion, perhaps it would be better to say that blackness is disclosed by a distance incapable of being traversed or negated. If, then (as Fanon consistently formulates it according to the logic of aporia), one were to try to answer the question (how is blackness possible?), then one would need to deconstruct this very opposition between irony and history, irony and truth.

The second, much more recent opposition, of a more Marxist aspect and largely tributary to the Althusserian paradigm of science/ideology, is that of the *unsaid* of literature. Or: literature makes us aware of what it cannot say, or is prevented from saying; an unsaid that both structures and fissures the semantic codes of the text (a limit that literature mouths silently): the unsaid is constructed as the limit of ideology, but it is through it that ideology speaks. At the very end of his introduction to *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*, first published in 1966, Macherey gives a brief summing up of this 'unsaid' structure, which establishes: "that absence around which a real complexity is knit."[12] This absence is determinate but not determined. The unsaid is then seen as the absent (though coded) residue of what the work *cannot say* or necessarily leaves unsaid; it is (the real, historical) elision that "founds the speech of the work" (if we define that speech as a kind of "vanishing" without which it could not be heard) that precedes its meaning *as* history (if we set meaning in opposition to its *denegation*—a word that Macherey borrows from Lacan but doesn't really define as such) (*ATLP*, 85, 86).[13] Just as the opposition surface/depth implies a hermeneutic vision, so the unsaid/meaning opposition implies an ultimately dialectical vision (under cover of a logic of confrontation): there is a reduction of the unsaid to that of a symptom (the idea that each work is "haunted by the absence of repressed words which make their return"), and of the symptom to history, where the unspoken "receives the means" of its "realization"; literature, the trace of the unsaid, and because it is specifically this trace, then makes negatively explicit its historic function, which Macherey here describes as its production: it is the task of any Marxist reading to show how the work establishes, symptomatically performs, and ideologically assumes its history, in the same way

that the "*unconscious of the work*" establishes repression (the way an abscess reveals an underlying disease), in order to lance the process of its suppuration (*ATLP*, 53). Hence, we arrive at the paradox of an unsaid which governs any reading as such, the entire pertinence of an indetermination (in relation to form, ideology, discourse, or history) which has no signified, yet through which everything happens or is produced as the "real" of the work.

I should like to suggest that the unsaid is what haunts every literary production. How, then, can we read or interpret it, and how does it relate to the *situation* of blackness? To answer this question we will need to inquire more closely into the relation between language and ideology. To do so, I will use as my example, Macherey's later reading of Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Accordingly (as I concluded at the beginning), we will see how blackness is produced—sutured—by a theory of reading that concedes that the essence of ideology is the production of a universal structure but in ways that make blackness itself invisible, which is absurd.

Let us take first the opposition of the unsaid and meaning, of subjection [*l'assujettissement*] and interpellation. No doubt how we read includes a certain relation to how we, in turn, are irreducibly read. The Marxist structural analysis of ideology is wholly based on the conviction (and the dialectical proof) that we subsist by how we reproduce ideology: in short, to occupy the grammar by which we are recognized as subjects we "*must answer*" the call of ideology, for there is "no possibility of dodging it" or its logic of reproducibility: the effects of ideology can be varied without altering this underlying structure (*ATLP*, 12). That Macherey should then say of the black that the "operation of selection" also takes "the form of a relegation," as implacable and as it is overdetermined, has exactly the same narrative (or, more precisely, structural) function as *l'assujettissement* does in Althusser (e.g. the way in which the subject "is called upon" is irreducible, since it is functionally necessary to the sequence by which the subject becomes elocutionary, or expressive of ideology) (Macherey, 13) .

The error, however—and it is here that we must modify Macherey's reading of blackness—would be to forget the irony by which the black realizes its untruth; what this (forgetting, as we have just said) forgets is not what brings about the content or the signified of selection, the racist forms of understanding that are assumed to be already *there* (*être-la*), but the form, the signifier, or if we prefer, the permanent parabasis by which the subject is desutured and *as such is never symbolizable* (for blackness is always articulated around a position which has no here-there (*juste là*); its signified is a never-having-been-there (or is more akin to a kind of hallucination), as we have shown in Fanon and even more clearly in his reading of psychoanalysis. Further, Fanon attempts to bring to light—without reference to verisimilitude or allegory—an interplay between voice and signifier in which the black (or more exactly the black who is ideologically whitened) *does not need the "tiens" to be heard for it to have an effect*, for the place it is communicated *from* is already echoed by a drive *towards* it, a *n'est pas* that is located at the *other* end, as it were,

of desire and reality, of subject and ideology; moreover this drive is *absent*, it necessarily slips away from any image or history of meaning; and even though it is full of malice and a certain defensiveness, this is an irony that has no symbolic code, genre, or disposition, whatever the material uses of ideology.

Hence, we can no longer *see* blackness as the overdetermined effect of a structural situation; blackness is not relegated, but effaced; in the black, there is only whiteness, or, more precisely, the black in its blackness is only a denegation of form—consequently, *there is no subject of blackness*. We can say metaphorically that the black is subjected not by what he is, but by what he is *not*: neither host nor parasite, the *nègre* resolutely intrudes as an obscene intrusion; it confuses distance and limit, not because of nausea, and not even because of autoimmunity, but because it is an abolition that is freely chosen (that is, a self-effacement that is always a forced choice). Doubtless, this is why its voicing is not primarily phenomenological (Macherey) nor *automatic* (Althusser), *but that which recedes*, as it were, from discourse, truth, and ideology. What is more ironic, more undecidable, more interruptive, than this structure by which blackness experiences itself as fixed in its effacement, and that declares itself free in its chosen unfreedom?

III.

Now let us turn to the second opposition, that of irony and history, which is in effect the opposition of Fanonism and Marxist phenomenology. There is a kind of intermediate step here that will lead us to the parabasis that we are trying to understand in the irony Fanon is invoking. Here too, we must refine our vision of what blackness is (or is not).

What enables Macherey to question Althusser is, as we have seen, the belief that the theory of ideology is blind to the functioning of difference. It is a blindness that is symptomatic, unsaid. And therefore, says Macherey, has to be decrypted. The features of the unsaid are, of course, undeniably drawn from Althusser, or at least from his idea of a symptomatic reading (the belief that what is unsaid is both absent and what grounds the text in a *real historical rationality*, i.e., a hermeneutics): like any discourse that claims to expose what is absent, how does one finally know that one has grasped the truth of ideology? What is its reference? How does it surreptitiously persist, constantly repeated by the work, without its meaning or signified being anything but what is *meant* by ideology? These propositions seem to be both excessive and insufficient: excessive because meaning is always returned to its referent, and the text thereby becomes the incarnation of an absolute reference; insufficient because the operation of *conversion* or *decryption* is never explained in all its depth. A word on this last point.

We know that the unsaid of the work, what determines at once its task and its limits, is the ideology that takes place by never taking place *as such*: there is no text without repression, or literature begins as the sign or allegory of a displacement; but, in order to think this, critique must be able to make repression

representable, for why otherwise would we read it; a Marxist theory of reading must thus expressly become the structure, the code, by which the unsaid emerges as the resolution of its ideologically repressed reference. Now, the irony of blackness (the black irony of thought) has essentially nothing to do with reference or repression; of course, it can include symptoms, but it does not need to be repressed for it to be unconscious: Fanon constantly talks about how blackness is the depositary of a cultural hatred that directly opens a black hole *within* the psyche, and in ways that are necessarily unknown or ambiguous, but no less real or traumatic for all that. Blackness is the signifier of a text that intrudes, but what intrudes has no determinable meaning beyond the intrusion itself to the point where blackness is the experience of a paradox: *an unconscious affect that is itself not unconscious*; it is better to speak, more neutrally, of a form that lacks repression, or for whom repression is lacking. Let us even add, perhaps: without arrival—or at least without the appearance of arrival, intrusion does not function as a meaning (a signified that is unsaid), but is the effect of an entire culture. But even here we are not really going far enough, for what remains to be described is a vanishing that is neither an event nor an occasion, and so cannot be dialectically overdetermined as something unsaid, or simply interpellated.

Whence Fanon's view of a black *n'est pas*: a figure that does not lend itself to figuration—or even that of production—a figure that subsequently is not a *verneinung*; a figure that is not tropological, but that reveals a dramatic antithetical turning point that Fanon characterizes as a *contre coup* or ricochet, that is, an adversative signifier that throws one off balance, out of kilter, off guard. In the "tiens, un nègre!" example: such a moment is foregrounded not by the various metaphors, but by the exclamation mark that suggests that the gaze cannot be grasped as readily or straightforwardly as Macherey suggests, i.e., as an intruding sense or intention, but as a punctuation without content. By carrying this distinction to its conclusions, we shall be working toward why blackness requires a different language than ontology; it is, Fanon says, the paradoxical figure of what cannot be figured, and that is indeed without phrase or sentence, even though it can be uttered, or said, and in respect to which the word *black* is little more than an antilogy, whose signified opens onto a perpetual parabasis in which Fanon suggests we experience the impossible: "I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but that had become impossible" (Fanon, cited in Macherey, 14).

Such sentences make it obvious why the *n'est pas* is not the work of a repression. But they also make it quite clear why the *n'est pas* cannot, consequently, be conceived as an existential situation. To explain why consider the following passage from *Black Skin, White Masks*, which I cite at some length:

> One of the traits of the Antillean is his desire to dominate the other. He steers his course through the other. It is always a question of subject, and the object is totally ignored. I try to read admiration in the eyes of the other, and if, as luck would have it, the other sends back

> an unpleasant reflection, I run the mirror down: the other is a real idiot [un imbécile]. (Fanon, 186)

And:

> Each of them wants *to be*, wants to *flaunt himself*. Every act of an Antillean is dependent on the Other—not because the Other remains his final goal for the purpose of communing with him as described by Adler, but simply because it is the Other who asserts him in his need to enhance his status. (Fanon, 187, translation mine)

So what is the Antillean's relation to the other? It is marked by one generic feature (which attaches it to an idiocy that is indeed foolish and that, not surprisingly perhaps, does not distinguish it from a complex rhetorical irony: the obligatory desire to be "full of myself," and to declare to the other this "wish for fullness" is already, in itself, the sign of an insufficiency that is both litotic and rhetorical: if these sentences of Fanon's are deeply ironic, it is because they show how the black desire to *be* is already foolish because it cannot fulfill itself (and presumably because it is mediated, dependent), and for whom the other is of the same order as a reflection that renders not plenitude but its opposite, a self-image that is inclined to be suspicious (of itself) because the other is inattentive to my (fictitious) exemplary status) (Fanon, 187). These sentences, in their complex rhetorical inversions, seem to me, then, to present black identity as a kind of pseudonymous delusion, and one marked by a rivalrous relation to another that, on this view, is in fact an ironical self-relation. What we must grasp here is not that such irony might *seem* foolish, but what it bespeaks is a claim to being that is radically displaced from being and that Fanon habitually describes as an antagonym.

This is not all. The black is a *comparaison* that itself has no status, in the sense given it through the pages of *Peau noire, masques blancs*, with its image of a distrust that is *itself* negrophobic when viewed from a black perspective, and that bespeaks an envy of the white *néant* that it lacks, such that it masks what is missing and cannot ironize away. This insight has considerable consequence for Fanon's understanding of interpellation since it corresponds to a confusion – not so much of appearing with phenomena—but of the *néant* with cogito, as if the other that besets me (and who plunges me into a black hole) could be simply annulled, or again, dispensed with, along the lines of a chiasmic reversal. So when Fanon writes: "The question is always whether he [the other] is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, or less good than I" (Fanon, 186), what is being thematized ironically is also an example of foolish undecidability (and, indeed, of mirage and error). Amidst such uncertainty and gnomic inversion it is hard to tell apart desire from a kind of pathological narcissism which, in a further paradoxical twist, also communicates a form of mastery and satisfaction, but one that can only perform itself as a kind of ontological stupidity, as is further evidenced by the fact that it is so obviously haunted

by what it is not, a *n'est pas* that Fanon draws attention to as an obligation that makes the decision to *be* both constrained and aporetic. Put another way, it is clear that, if blackness is *n'est pas*, a *non-étant* otherwise repressed by phenomenology, clinically it signifies not so much "*a being by which nothingness comes to things*" (the words are Sartre's), but a nothingness whose being is a thing, and that reproduces itself as the imprint or turning point of a destitution that is also its most luxurious possession (Sartre, 57).[14] It follows that, for Fanon, blackness is not a dialectical struggle between an *en-soi* and cogito, but an aporetic struggle over the status of what is lacking, and one that is linked not to how one is seen, or how one imagines oneself being seen, but to *a disgrace of being* stupefied by irony.

Condemned, unconscious, prohibited—and yet performed: let us say that blackness cannot affirm, or choose, itself, for it is already chosen—by which I mean that it cannot pass from indecision to a transformation of what subordinates it; the paradoxical gravity, and fate, by which it is at once undecidably mad, foolish, and deluded; and, as is so often the case, bespeaks an almost religious love for what would destroy it, and that luxuriates in both the choice and the experience; an inheritance based on culture and not on pathology (and consequently is never *just* a question of unconscious desire). The *n'est pas* certainly has some affinity with a symptomatic morphology, but it differs from it on one fundamental point (the predicates associated with these aporias imply a self-blinding irony that, once again, is never simply ideological): the *n'est pas* (whose form is derived from a logic of corpsing) cannot be resolved (*aufheben*) nor negated; for as Macherey shows perhaps in spite of himself, it speaks to the ways in which blackness is the depositary of culture, how it is excluded, not just selected; out of kilter, not just turned around; nihilated, not just subjected.

To return, in conclusion, to the concept of interpellation that I discussed at the beginning: in my opinion, it must consist today not in trying to see history within the unsaid of the text: in *Peau noire, masques blancs* the unsaid is not the form of the text but that which can never be said and which I would prefer to call, at least in this essay, the permanent parabasis of a black allegory. The problem of what it means to be a subject can only be treated in relation to what I call an undecidable question; and which, to continue the metaphor, can be summed up by saying that, if hitherto we have read black texts as stupidly referential (as identical to their situation), it would be better to read them as the place where blackness is suspended or interrupted (as a question of authenticity), whose irony, as Fanon describes it reading Césaire, is nothing but an abyssal infinity—which envelops and absorbs nothing other than the black hole of its relation to ontology and destruction.

Endnotes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the seminar: "Unthinking Affect: Blackness, Incapacity, Negativity," at ACLA 2019. My thanks to Tyrone S. Palmer and the other participants.

1. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Éditions du Seuil: Paris, 1995: 6. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008. Hereafter cited parenthetically in-text.
2. Pierre Macherey, "Figures of Interpellation in Althusser and Fanon." *Radical Philosophy* 173 (May/June 20, 9-20): 17, my emphasis. Hereafter cited parenthetically in-text. When Macherey, describing the effect of Althusser's iconic 1970 essay, "Ideology and ISA," tells us that it was "particularly disconcerting" to him, whose "enigma" he was "left to decrypt"—the decision to interrogate that enigma and its formulae (an odd phrase that conveys something systematic in relation to meaning), is what leads him to turn to Fanon, specifically *Peau noire, masques blancs* and the sentence, "Tiens, un nègre!": "it is interesting to compare them," he writes, and to contrast their "taking up [of] the problem of subjectivation [*subjectivation*]" (ibid.: 9). But what also remains enigmatic, or at least rhetorically unexplained, is how this return to the notion of *retournement*, whose limits are scrupulously reproduced, does not include Macherey's own use of the concept in *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*, to capture the *difference* between art and ideology; or how art makes ideology *visible*, decipherable, by exposing its imaginary contours as in a broken mirror. This displaced genealogy would seem to suggest (contrary to Macherey) a *retourné* that is itself ambiguous, displaced, absent; there is even, in this subtle and odd reversal, a suspicion that blackness is the *inverted* image of this earlier attachment, and so the means by which *retourné* makes visible the belief, posterior to Althusser, that ideology is a specular relation, and/or how art presents a real that is the (black?) reversal of ideology. The pattern is itself paradoxical, ironical, and too precise (which does not mean innocent) not to be deliberate. We shall be broaching its repercussions throughout.
3. Significantly, Macherey says that Althusser's notion of subjection allows Marxist literary theory to go beyond the 'classical' reading of ideology: in which "*ideology is defined by what it is not*, by what it fails to be, or, to put it another way, by the distance it keeps from the real and its materiality" (Macherey, 9, my italics). This old traditional understanding of ideology, in brief, is disappointing for it can only see ideology as a *reflection* of, rather than effective agent of, social reproduction: in fact, Macherey insists that ideology is neither a representational nor reactive response to the real. This *is* not—its rhetoric or what it calls into question—will be of much concern to us in what follows given its ubiquity in both *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* and this later essay on Althusser and Fanon.
4. For a detailed analysis of these terms and figures see my *Whither Fanon?: Studies in the Blackness of Being*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018.
5. Moreover, what exists here as *n'est pas*, or its interruption, is essentially a vanishing point *within* meaning. This is why we perhaps should not name it as an ontology, or seek a meaning in it that amounts to a political ontology or—the same thing—a para-ontology. It is quite significant that these terms rely on ontological language to describe what blackness *is* (as a trope whose meaning is thenceforth beyond analogy or hermeneutics); see recent texts by Frank Wilderson, Sylvia Wynter, and Nahum Chandler.
6. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. Paris : Gallimard : 1943. All references are to the English translation by Hazel E. Barnes. New York : Philosophical Library, 1966.
7. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004: 65.
8. After references to Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive* (1946), Macherey argues that Fanon's analysis remains existential, phenomenological; that it is constituted by a *situation*, "which is to say on the plane that is at once that of being for itself and that of being for the other, in a certain historical context" (Macherey, 17). It follows that a subject is only "ever a subject in a situation," and that is because the subject is always *overdetermined* (a word that we shall come back to): "which is to say a subject specified according to the norms of the situation" (Macherey, 18). And it is because Althusser fails to ask or question "the criteria imposed by the situation," that he also fails to see how interpellation is both a process of *selection* and *relegation* (Macherey, 19). This is what we might call the true thrust of Macherey's *anti-Althusserian decryption*: subjection is not only a recruitment by which the subject learns to subject itself, it is also a prescription by which some are told that they are less than human, resisted as the very negation of agency and will.
9. See chapter ten, "The Abyssal" in *Whither Fanon?*
10. Frantz Fanon, "West Indians and Africans," in *Towards the African Revolution*. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove Press, 1967: 27. Hereafter *Towards* plus page no.
11. Paul de Man, "The Concept of Irony," in *The Aesthetic Ideology*. (178)

12. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1978: 101. Hereafter cited parenthetically in-text.
13. See Jacques Lacan, "Response to Jean Hyppolite's Commentary on Freud's 'Verneinung' (1954)" Trans. B. Fink, H. Fink, and R. Grigg. *Écrits*, *The First Complete Edition in English*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.: J. 2006: 308-333. For an elaboration of Fanon's relation to Lacan, see my *Lacan Noir*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming.
14. Reading across from *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* to *Peau noire, masques blancs*, it is precisely absence which can be described as a situation of being overdetermined by, and an indeterminate relation to, a desire that reproduces itself as impossibility. As *ruinare*, the *n'est pas* is not, or not only, a negation: we could also say that it subsists as an ontological impurity that is the trace of the other within us, consequently, there is no defense against it, for it is how blackness absents itself—whitens itself—that overdetermines its own negrophobic appearance as a passion that is violently envious, morally unjust.

Untitled #2

Taija Mars McDougall

All right, gentlemen, I'm taking over now.
— Jonathon Jackson

There is much to say about the deep details of the interplay between Black American and French radical left scenes of struggle that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. While the happenings and contact points suggest intimacy—particularly when it comes to Jean Genet, who writes the introduction to the original edition of *Soledad Brother*—that French intellectuals parasitically took up the challenges of Black American Maoisms in the mid-twentieth century to furnish their own intellectual legacies is not of central importance here.[1] What I am concerned about are the specifics of George Jackson's thought throughout *Soledad Brother* and *Blood in My Eye*, the energy that his thought is invested with, and what Deleuze and Guattari do with his work, specifically the quote which they mobilize in both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. I am concerned in multiple directions. Firstly, how do Deleuze and Guattari mischaracterize Jackson's words, bringing a weapon on a stroll, as it were? In their mischaracterization, which provides critical theoretical scaffolding for their concept of the "line of flight" or "line of escape"—the concept that powers fugitive movement as Black politics—falters. Instead, if we read Jackson with Jackson, we can reject escape and flight as at the heart of a revolutionary praxis. We can do something else, look to other forms of movement, and different orientations that are not based on the empty space that Jackson occupies within Deleuze and Guattari's text and thought.

Schizo/a on the Way Out

Where is the schizo/a? The focus has tended to be on what the schizophrenic figure at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's work *does*, but *where* does the schizo/a do it? Taking a moment to situate them might prove useful for our purposes. They—singular—are located in a system, we say. While those around them drift through the machinery like Hexxus, the schizo/a breaks… "He [*sic*] is transsexual. He [*sic*] is trans-alivedead, trans-parentchild. He [*sic*] does not reduce two contraries to an identity of the same; he [*sic*] affirms their distance as that which relates the two as different."[2] The schizo/a figure, rather than slipping and sliding and stumbling through the machinery of binary organization, opens the machinery of the hyphen, of the grammar and its postulates. The opening of this machinery, blowing holes in walls and ensuring that something of the wall can never be put back in its place,

opening up spots for flows and intensities of desire to move. So, where are they? If we do not know where they are, how can we possibly plot them in order to, in some way, know where they are going? Immediately we are in a spatial conundrum where the schizo/a is concerned. There are other conundrums, but these come later—or something akin to later. If we can figure out the place, maybe we can figure out the time, where they are going and what time it will be when they get there. From here, we can look in different ways in order to sort out the other, further puzzles.

Deleuze and Guattari give us a clue as to where the the schizo/a is and where we can locate them. They are *within* something. This is locked into the logic of the chosen diction as Deleuze and Guattari write: "we must not flee…But the revolutionary knows escape is revolutionary."[3] Elsewhere, "there is no so such thing as relatively independent spheres or circuits: production is immediately consumption, and a recording process (*enregistrement*), without any sort of mediation, and the recording process and consumption directly determine production, though they do so within the production process itself."[4] The schizo/a is *within* the spheres or circuits, the network of the socius. Perhaps, more accurately for Deleuze and Guattari, they are in multiple things all at once: the social field, the Oedipal triangle, in process, in production, being recorded, and at a meeting libidinal banker's office attempting to take out a loan. These could all be one and the same. And in fact, they are. They are all instances of the socius *within* which the schizo/a can be located. They, like the rest of us are *within* that social body that holds the apparent patent, copyright, and so monopoly, on the codings of desire.[5] Immediately and without mediation, then, we have our first notion of where the schizo/a is. There are some hints throughout *Anti-Oedipus* that suggest how the sphere or circuit in which the schizo/a finds themselves might appear, or at least what features it has, were we to attempt to list it with a real estate brokerage. Most importantly, there are walls.

The coding sphere or circuit, or socius, in which we can locate the schizo/a is, firstly and most importantly, walled. This leads to certain architectural questions. Is a ceiling a wall? Is a floor a wall? Which walls are loadbearing? Can the integrity of the wall be compromised? Are they opaque or transparent? While the questions themselves appear superfluous, they simultaneously suggest and delimit the potential movement of our friendly schizo/a who, it appears, is *in* for a walk, rather than out. But then, there is also another wall: a schizophrenic wall. Deleuze and Guattari go further: "Very few accomplish what [R.D.] Laing calls the breakthrough of this schizophrenic wall or limit…but the majority draw near the wall and back away horrified."[6] The schizo/a is there, bounded by the walls of the socius, and, critically, there is a there-there, a walled territory in which the production of everything, from desire to coffee grinders and plastic doohickeys, occurs. There is mommydaddyschizo/a producing the collapsing oedipal nightmare and the teacherdoctorschizo/a producing the medicodiscursive terrain and the treecityschizo/a producing nature. For Deleuze and Guattari, the schizo/a is everywhere within the socius, or potentially everywhere as the overcoded and the

overcoding of a bourgeois city—the Freudian child lives at the corner of Mommy Road and Daddy Drive—which is always becoming-nation, -house, -site and so on. They, the schizo/a, according to Deleuze and Guattari, are within the machinery, but is also "beyond territoriality, because he [*sic*] has carried his flows right out to the desert."[7] The schizo/a is in the socius for a stroll, in the way that Deleuze and Guattari assume they are moving *in* for the kill, or that we are *in* for a treat.

So, we find our schizo/a in a socius-with-walls, the place in which all the machines find themselves as they attach, detach, assemble, dissemble, resemble. A place that is factory-like that drives many into the always waiting embrace of madness, but not the schizo/a, who repurposes the energy here into a movement that is apparently utterly different than the rest of us. Their movement is seemingly the key to some sort of revolutionary spirit and action, to the correct political position and posture, to breaking-through, rather than down. The schizo/a schizzes, and if they are so full of potential for revolutionary change to the socius, if their movement can break its walls, then it behooves us to ask about their movement. How do they move? What is the content of such movement? Is it so different? Described variously as flowing, oozing, strolling, wandering about, migrating, the schizo/a, to Deleuze and Guattari, encapsulates these various dance-steps that do the work of breaking through the walls of the socius. Their movement has a component of breaking, even if none of the above verbs adhere to such a conception. For example, for a flow to be liberated, for it to move beyond the walls of the socius, it must flow at such a concentration and with such strength that it can "blow the cover off."[8] If they ooze, there must be something corrosive, something in that movement that allows them through these walls. Regardless, the schizo/a, as Deleuze and Guattari imagine them, has some way of breaking through the wall.

Deleuze and Guattari tell us that the schizo/a has broken through the wall, out into the desert, the implication being that there is nothing out there but the sands of time, racist stereotypes from Disney and Outness. Even in the desert to which they appear to exit, they exit to that space and reterritorialization is immediate. The socius expands out to meet them, what were solid walls proving to be elastic, mutable, a limit that can be approached but resistant to breach. This is the "two-fold movement" of de- and reterritorialization that Deleuze and Guattari detail in both *Anti-Oedipus* and its companion text *A Thousand Plateaus* and the moves that sit at the heart of a post-68 modernity and attendant lessons in political organizing. The first move is the move away; the second is the working out of the "re-" prefix in relations of power: reconstitution, reorganization, reinstitution, recognition—break the "re-" away from its stem. Codes are seemingly broken and overwritten, but there are still codes, which are moving, in contest and contention. These codes circulate in a prepositionally absolute way and the schizo/a streaks alongside as they break. Yet, Deleuze and Guattari suggest a prepositional orientation that is for the schizo/a:

> we have distinguished the schizophrenic process ("the breakthrough") from the accidents and relapses that hinder or interrupt it ("the breakdown"), and because on the other hand we have posited paranoia no less than schizophrenia as independent of all familial pseudo etiologies, so as to make them bear directly upon the social field: every name in history, and not the name of the father. [9]

The distinction between 'through' and 'down' as the orientation and direction of our friendly schizo/a's breaking gives us a clue that we should perhaps reject Deleuze and Guattari's own characterization of the movement of their own character. The schizo/a liberates flows of desire when they break through the walls. The schizo/a breaks the wall, but they do not leave. They are still *within* if they move to the desert, which is, sadly still within a territory in which they can ooze and flow. The desert, the body without organs, it is another aspect of the same machinic configuration, another part of the factory of the socius. The social machine, for Deleuze and Guattari, is identical with the desiring machine and the body without organs, the desert that the schizo/a moves towards, experiencing *x*, where *x* can be anything produced, as a process of production. The wall that drives others to horror is the one the schizo/a apparently breaks. This is the essence of schizo/a's movement within what we have called the socius which is something like a factory, but we can likely call it a prison in the same way that we can follow Foucault if we so choose.[10] There could be further precedence for calling this walled place where the schizo/a was, is, and will be, a prison. Who do they choose to uphold as emblematic of the schizo/a figure? Here we find George Jackson. We also find John Brown, Jack Kerouac and Céline, but we will focus on George Jackson as his praxis, I argue, is what they have in mind when they are considering the movements of the schizo/a, the one who breaks through.

Breaking through is the move of the line of flight, which is itself deterritorialization.[11] It is to fly, not in the sense of a bird, but in the sense of an escape, to create an outlet. It is the "through" in breakthrough, which implies the way we can understand the nouns and verbs of the proclamation and proposition, how they relate and in which directions, with which orientations and when. The schizo/a opens the line of flight, sets out the line of flight, as they approach the frontier, which is something to cross, to push back, to go beyond. [12] Bound up in the becoming, which Deleuze—with Parnet rather than Guattari—writes, is the geographic.[13] This is the movement of the schizo/a, the schizo/a movement can be motionless, can be to-not-travel, but simultaneously immobile and with big strides. It can be paradoxical; it can be generative, for Deleuze following Toynbee, as it creates new weapons. Yet, to follow Deleuze to the letter suggests that we can put immobile movement to the side and adhere to the constructive work that Deleuze and Guattari contend is the unbuilding of heterogenous chains of signifiers, "carrying them off in every direction."[14] The schizo/a out for their stroll strolls polyvalently, in

multiple directions at once, outward towards, and with each brick of the signifying chain in hand, they have a weapon.

Taking these steps to focus on the materiality of where the schizo/a is and what they are up to is crucial if we intend to understand the nucleus of Deleuze and Guattari's text and project in *Anti-Oedipus*. It is a plunge deep into the text that advocates the reconsideration of psychoanalysis, deepening it to a schizoanalysis. I contend that Deleuze and Guattari envision a specific example of a schizo—gendered here—at the heart of their project. The schizo *par excellence* is not John Brown as they themselves suggest, but rather he who follows, he who they invoke, conjure, and call upon to give their work a scaffolding. The schizo that Deleuze and Guattari have in mind is George Jackson. I will, in the next section, move further into this point. Here, we can join arms with Jackson and accompany him on his stroll. He will have to go in just a moment, so we will have to be quick.

Blowing off the Cover: combat, poetry, sticks

We have sat down to interview the schizo/a, and we have found something we can work with. Something we can report back to the department with our overpriced but charmingly kitsch "Field Notes" notebook from the utterly non-self-reflexive University Bookstore in hand. We have some ideas about this character, where they live, how they move about, what their authors, Deleuze and Guattari think about them. We have located them, situated them, not at the corner of Mommy Road and Daddy Drive, but in the vast factory of social coding, with wall(s), ceiling(s) and floor(s). They are out for a stroll, but until the schizo/a comes into their revolutionary potential, bears witness to the wall and is faced with the reality of the breakthrough, the risk of breakdown exists. Deleuze and Guattari, but the former in particular, consider George Jackson, prisoner theorist, Black Panther Party Field Marshall, to be the schizo/a they have in mind when they detail the movements and location of the schizo/a. The schizo/a Jackson, ungendered, is in prison.

Michelle Koerner has noted in "Line of Escape: Gilles Deleuze's Encounter with George Jackson" that this quote of Jackson's appears three times in Deleuze's oeuvre, accompanied by his name, and each time it is without "introduction, explanation, or elaboration as though the line were ripped entirely from historical considerations."[15] While Koerner goes on to castigate simplistic and reactive readings that lean on Deleuze and Guattari for ahistorical appropriation or dangerous decontextualization, she also compels readers of Deleuze and Guattari and Jackson to pay close attention to "the way that blackness claims an unruly place in philosophy and philosophies of history" and this is precisely what I aim to do with what follows from here.[16] Appropriation and decontextualization of Jackson's work and life is not the concern, but what Deleuze and Guattari, and those who take on a politics of fugitivity as the revolutionary position and posture, base their thinking upon and how and why the line of flight as a moving assemblage of escape/counterattack fails. To read Jackson with Jackson and to read Jackson in the space and face of his own

absenting, which is the tactic this paper will deploy from here, reveals that we must move elsewise here. In short, for Jackson we must recognize and utilize his writing as a weapon, as Koerner and Jean Genet have indicated, but in the constant mistranslations of Jackson and his critically underexamined absence from the citational record of all Deleuze's texts, we will see if we can discern precisely where the line of flight, and the politics of fugitivity break apart, where the escape/counterattack posture misses Jackson's subterranean thought.[17] Even if Jackson is the schizo/a *par excellence*, we are brought to a point in which signification has failed and it is from this failure that, if we are lucky we can catch the train with Jackson, not out in the desert, but perhaps somewhere else.

Turning towards the translation of *fuite*, Brian Massumi has written that we should not understand 'flight' here as flying, but rather as the companion noun of fleeing. Massumi goes further to write that like the movement of our schizo/a above, *fuite* encompasses leaking, oozing, flowing, and the movement to the vanishing point, to disappearing. Hence, the translation of *ligne de fuite* into both line of flight and line of escape.[18] Hovering here for a moment on the problem of translation for Deleuze's English translators, we are faced with a question that straddles the three sites in Deleuze's oeuvre where Jackson is invoked.[19] How can it be that different translations of the same passage are always retranslated into English differently? The direct quote from *Soledad Brother* reads "I may run, but all the time that I am, I'll be looking for a stick."[20] In *Anti-Oedipus*, Jackson may take flight and will be looking for a weapon. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, he is looking for a gun as he runs, and Jackson disappears *in toto* in the original French.[21] In "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature" with Claire Parnet, he is looking for a weapon again.[22] Jeremy Matthew Glick has written that to prefer and preserve 'stick' is to recognize in Jackson "a deep commitment to improvisation" and upholding Jackson's words exactly is critical.[23]

Michelle Koerner asks how a line in French, under translation from English, can prove to be such a sticking point for translators who are bringing Jackson's quote back into the original English. I submit that this relates to the shadow of Jackson in Deleuze's thought, and of Jackson's role as schizo/a more generally.[24] With the schizo/a, who in their movements about, unbuild signifying chains, straddle binaries that then break under their weight, let loose flows that can lead to blowing off covers—of societies and beds—and leave the confinement of specifically coded desiring-production, to take a piece of the socius that organizes desire, even it is to be remade differently as it is re-territorialized.

Deleuze's thought is subtended by Jackson's words and Jackson's life. In terms of publication timing, with *Anti-Oedipe* published in 1972 and Jackson dead at the hands of the state in 1971, Jackson's thinking predates Deleuze and Guattari's. His work in *Soledad Brother* and *Blood in My Eye*, which despite any effort to transfigure Jackson into a romantic revolutionary-cum-passive victim of state violence is wholly mislaid. It is to misread, at a fundamental level, the meaning of the quote

itself. George Jackson. "I may run, but all the time that I am, I'll be looking for a stick."[25] Again, "We must accept the eventuality of bringing the USA to its knees."[26] Further,

> "And it follows that if a thing is not building, it is certainly decaying—that life is revolution—and that the world will die if we don't read and act out its imperatives. Not on its own will it die, but rather because the forces of reaction have created imbalances that will kill it: "The seeds of its own destruction." Our destruction too.[27]

Immediately, we are brought into direct confrontation with Deleuze and Guattari's own notion of Jackson's thought. While they claim that the "Hegel-style destructions, ways of conserving" must be abandoned, arm in arm with our schizo/a as they lead the way, even if their recording, unbuilding "code does not coincide with the social code, or coincides with it only in order to parody it" they conserve and preserve in ways that Jackson does not.[28] These works of disconnection and reconnection, strolling out into the desert, scrambling the codes, but leaving coding intact are contra Jackson as he writes, "It isn't revolutionary or materialist to disconnect things. To disconnect revolutionary consciousness from revolutionizing activity…is idealistic rather than materialist.[29]

While we are confronted with guns, weapons and sticks in Deleuze and Guarttari, in Jackson we have only the latter. He writes in *Blood in My Eye* that "[t]he task of the revolutionary is to make revolution.' The word 'manufacture' can be substituted for the word 'make' and the meaning comes through a little better for us."[30] To create by hand, to build, to create, know the intimate involvement of one's body and bodies in the breaking of revolutionary waves upon the shores of world. This is the revolutionary task that Jackson sets before us that Deleuze and Guattari turn away from in favor of the schizzes, the processes, and procedures that in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, "never consist in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a hole in a pipe." And further, "that group or individual creates the line rather than following it, is itself the living weapon it forges rather than stealing one."[31] In the mistranslations, from gun to weapon—but only a stick for Jackson—a piece of the scaffolding falls away. The stability of Jackson as our friendly neighborhood schizo/a renders schizo/a activity and energy in a different light.

Now with Jackson we are faced with a repetition in Deleuze's work and I would go so far as to suggest that this represents a compulsion to repeat. It is a compulsion to conjure Jackson, to mistranslate, to furnish lines of flight and invoke his name only to catch the resonances and reverberations with their conceptions of the schizo/a. It is not a repetition of appropriation or of decontextualization as Koerner warns us against, but rather a repetition of misunderstanding, a repetition of disengagement with Jackson's theoretical work, and disavowal of the ground he breaks. Put differently, it is a repetition of a commitment to becoming-black, to blackness as a political positionality that can be put on like clothes—or a cape, to

Deleuze and Guattari's mind—and, the implication is that it can be removed, that becoming, which is always in process, in the midst of its procedure, can be stopped. It is a repetition of an evacuation—not an escape—that removes Jackson, his being, his theoretical contributions, his black body, confined and taken apart by the state, from the text itself and so from the political, from the discursive. To make him uncited, in the original French and translated German, to open a space for the citation and to commit him to absence is emblematic of this repetition of evacuation. Becoming-black is, in short, more revolutionary than being black. Jackson's failed escape, as he runs, the perpetual motion machine, is what makes him black to Deleuze and Guattari. Jackson, the conjured spirit, the exemplary schizo/a, who can unbuild the signifying chains and break through the walls, liberating flows and scrambling codes—transwhiteblack like John Brown—escaped, got away. There he goes: "*il se peut que je fuie, mais tout au long de ma fuite, je cherche une arme*."[32] Worse still, if we read Jackson with himself, and with Afropessimism, we are confronted with something akin to an ontological limit of vital mobility.[33] Further, an epistemological limit to vital mobility as his work cannot be cited, cannot be indexed, does not only move in the ways that Deleuze and Guattari envision in their schizo/a. He moves some other way. In short, faced with the gap that stares back at inquiring eyes and minds from page 393 of the reference notes to "Introduction to Schizoanalysis" we find where our codes and language not only fail. They disintegrate, lapse back into the deathly conservatism of the world—of anti-blackness of black death for white psychic health and its material configurations—and we stumble upon the pathogenic nucleus of such flights of fancy as the line of escape.

The Dragon has Come: Working (preposition) Jackson

Now that we have cleared the air, we can perhaps cut to the heart of Jackson's theoretical contribution that is utterly different and totally unfamiliar to the schizo/a of *Anti-Oedipus*. Throughout *Soledad Brother*, the more personal and seemingly unguarded version of literary and theoretical George Jackson, we are met again and again with a Jackson who is on the run. It is not particularly surprising that a prison epistolary is concerned with the pressing problem of capture and escape. Fugitive notions and wishes are woven through the text, leading to the escape as counterattack, counterattack in escape reading of Jackson that serves as a scaffolding of fugitive practice and politics. The stealing oneself—tenuous as a 'Black oneself' may be—is the becoming black that Deleuze and Guattari mention. If we follow David Marriott's critique of Fred Moten's fugitivity, it is the perpetual exceeding action of the black being that is the hallmark of fugitive movement.[34] We would assume with Jackson that he engenders this exceeding of blackness as he writes "I still think of myself as a black, and an African but I can't be satisfied with myself until I am a communist *man*, revolutionary *man*" (emphasis Jackson's).[35] This appears as exactly the disavowal of racial positioning that Moten and Marriott are speaking about, and the escape of our schizo/a. But there is something else happening in the italicized

repetition of 'man' that importantly does not accompany 'black' nor 'African'. In one sentence, Jackson reveals the proto-pessimism of the social death of blackness, the always already severed 'black' from '(hu)man' and the possibility of 'becoming', of in his being doing as Deleuze and Guattari say. He would be scrambling the codes that bar 'black' from being joined by 'man', 'African' from 'communist', and joining, in his being, black with revolutionary. We have thus arrived at fugitivity, at exceeding the racist disavowal, escaping the "racism of its history."[36] Complete and full circle.

Wait. "I haven't seen the night sky for a decade" Jackson writes from "June, 1970 7."[37] This line comes in a letter to Joan, a member of the Soledad Defense Committee, as he tells her further "Last week (?) when I mentioned that I felt older than I am, I wasn't referring to my knees or elbows, back or hands, nor did I mean that I felt in any way wise. I feel old Joan, in the sense that a paper parget is old after about an hour on the Police Academy practice range. Used." The codes that he seems to have so diligently scrambled to Deleuze and Guattari's mind snap back in to place.[38] Jackson's capture, his confinement, exceeds and specifies his running. His counterattack is not counterattack so much as a movement that is built upon a different emphasis entirely. If we delve into the movement that Jackson is envisioning in the quoted line, we can see the glimmers of something else, a different move. To be clear, this is not a refashioning of a social life a la Moten, but rather a way to understand the meaning of a revolutionary black politic that is not bound up with escape, but rather with the turn, with the grasping of a weapon, with improvisation, with a position to defend as the outer limit of the world stays at a constantly-receding horizon.

"I may run, but all the time that I am I'll be looking for a stick! A defensible position!" If we loiter here, we can pick apart some of the implications that will first lead us to a different revolutionary trajectory. Jackson, his black body lived and died in the carceral system, which is always already also in captivity, is on the run, moving away, outside protection—which is not the same thing as outside—with the Weathermen. Jackson, as Deleuze and Guattari's schizo/a is on the move, on the run, but Jackson takes this movement further. There is a step missing in the schizo/a-move, which we should probably understand as a dance. When we recoup the declarative exclamation that follows and reattach it to Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalytic furniture, the move, is clear. Jackson is not advocating for escape in the way Deleuze and Guattari write is the correct posture of the revolutionary, which is to unbuild, to scramble, to liberate flows of desire, reorganize the signifying chain through disorganization. Instead, Jackson is looking for two things: a stick—a weapon of improvisation—and a defensible position. This second sought-after object, the defensible position implies that the movement is not one of a line, but rather one of a turn. Because "it's never occurred to [Jackson] to lie down and be kicked! It's silly!" he writes as the passage in *Soledad Brother* continues, "When

I do that I'm depending on the kicker to grow tired. The better tactic is to twist the leg a little or pull it off if you can."[39]

In essence, it is not that escape is always already also counterattack, as effective counterattack requires something different by way of tactics than fugitive movement, than disavowal of disavowal of anti-blackness, than solitary thefts of one's body, successful as those fugitive moves have been. It is about the turn back to the attacker. Jackson's work is not solely about the revolutionary-on-the-fly and in isolation, no matter how he spent his days in state capture. Scenes of subjection break in on him and his writing suggesting that his is not solitary action. He writes to Fay Stender in the "April, 1970 4" letter that he doesn't "want to raise any more black slaves. We have a determined enemy who will accept us only on a master-slave basis. When I revolt, Slavery dies with me. I refuse to pass it down again. The terms of my existence are founded on that."[40] He writes elsewhere., "I am tortured by the vision of someone like myself standing at the bars of his cell two hundred years from now cursing *me*—dereliction."[41] The perpetual escape comes apart as Jackson homes in on the turn as the move of revolution, even if the revolutionary may have to run.

Here sits the correction of the correction of opening space for Jackson only to leave it blank, floating in these theoretical waters.[42] In this rereading, the orientation of Jackson's revolutionary strategy changes before us. He is no longer the schizo/a, liberating flows of desire; he is revolution, a swimmer in the ocean of violence. As he writes his poem of love and combat, pace Jean Genet, Jackson evokes Frantz Fanon, as the latter writes, "In the armed struggle, there is what we could call the point of no return," and again a few pages later, "the armed struggle mobilizes the people, i.e., it pitches them in a single direction, from which there is no turning back."[43] At the point of the "armed struggle at the heart of every revolution" (*BME* 77), is the limit, the wall, the point in which the world has come loose. In approaching the limit, to turn back is to find the terrain behind utterly deformed, deranged and to find that "'*we can*' is a fundamental antecedent" to the Black "survival projects."[44]

However, we are left with the problem of Blackness, the remainder. Jackson writes "It is the relationship that much change."[45] We can open this line up multiply to interrogate Blackness as remainder, excess, as suspended in the world. I want to define relationality as a capacity to find and communicate oneself relative to other subjects, but also relative to the world. Put differently, relationality requires the capacity to narrate and be narrated in ways that allow for prepositional acknowledgement, for the capacity to offer intelligible answers to questions of 'When?' 'Where?' and 'How?' that sync up with recognizable concepts of time, place, agent and action. With Jackson as Black being—not becoming-black—we can see the ways in which relationality fails. He writes in *Soledad Brother*:

> My recall is nearly perfect, time has faded nothing. I recall the very first kidnap. I've lived through the passage, died on the passage, lain in the

> unmarked, shallow graves of the millions who fertilized the Amerikan [*sic*] soil with their corpses; cotton and corn growing out of my chest, 'unto the third and fourth generation,' the tenth, the hundredth. My mind ranges back and forth through the uncounted generations, and I feel all that they ever felt, but double. I can't help it; there are too many things to remind me of the 23½ hours that I'm in this cell. Not ten minutes pass without a reminder. In between, I'm left to specualte [*sic*] on what form the reminder will take.[46]

I take this as emblematic of the failure of prepositional relationality. We can ask Jackson 'When are you?' to be granted an answer that suggests that Jackson is out of time, out of cartography, turning back to the attacker to find the attacker was everywhere. We can pose the question for which no one is prepared: When do we start? The answer will confound, as for Jackson, we started already. We have, in the fullest sense of the academic cliché, always already started. He is not only in Soledad Prison; he is in the hold, on the plantation, on the run. Perhaps we could say Jackson is under the prison, since the hold, between the plantation, until the run. Jackson's passage does as it says; it ranges back and forth, out of the bounds of relationality. There is no contradiction; there is no time. There is the turn back to struggle only to find that struggle was in front and before and beyond the black, waiting, already enveloping, swaddling, covering with a sheet. Jackson does not himself scramble the codes, as Deleuze and Guattari write is the move of the schizo/a. His, ours, is a world in which codes, which thrive on relationality to be sensible, are predicated on his incapacity to find himself within them, to access them in ways that are intelligible to the world. To work with Jackson, to work with black thought, is to bracket the preposition. It is to build survival projects without preposition, to move as the guerrilla moves to move, as the black femme moves, who are one and the same. That is (preposition) the street, (preposition) the prison, (preposition) the home, (preposition) the school, and to know that the attack, the predator is always already everywhere. On your mind, under your bed, and worst of all, in your heart.

Opportunity as obituary: Deleuze on the couch, with Jackson in Deleuze, who is in Jackson

We have come quite a way and it has not been easy going. We seem to be a little out of breath; perhaps it is time to take a rest.

Deleuze writes of his philosophical method being an act of:

> taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child

> was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed. [47]

This passage takes on a terrible valence when we take George Jackson and Gilles Deleuze together with a citational practice that leaves Jackson out but produces a theoretical child all the same: the line of flight. It is no wonder that it is one of Deleuze's most influential, and no wonder it is at this moment we are confronted with the specter of miscegenation and its brutality-inducing anxieties. Does the line of flight pass? Is it a black thought, hoped to be made white through its white mom-mydaddy Deleuze, but always failing because it is itself predicated on a disavowed dyadic move—the turn and the grasping of or for weapons—one that Deleuze and Guattari could never envision? To mount a politics on the turn with your weapon would mean a shot away from Deleuze and Guattari, from the unbuilding, scrambling, breaking-through, frenetic moves of the schizo/a to the rhythmic movements of blackness, the survival projects, the armed struggle—we have our sticks. To work, build, love, care and fight without preposition beyond the point of no return. This is not the child that Deleuze envisioned, but—shame—it is the one he got.

As a way of closing I will finally turn to Freud's characterization of dream analysis and the hole that sits in the references to *Anti-Oedipus*, where Jackson could be but is not. I do this in order to lay out some questions that will have to be taken up further if we aim to understand the deeper texture of the hidden claim above. We could take *Anti-Oedipus* as we can take Lacan's seminars for the psychoanalytic encounter. The former appears as schizoanalytic encountering, in process. The ways in which the text is shot through with exclamations, declarations, "destroy, destroy."[48] We are somehow with the text offered a glimpse, perhaps more than was or could be intended, into an unconscious. I say this because to follow Freud:

> There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware in the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown.[49]

This moment, where words fail, where language is confronted with the tangle of the unconscious, with the dead matter at the nucleus, the wholly unfamiliar with the rejoinder that it is oneself right there faced with the structure of the Symbolic. In this empty space where no language exists in *Anti-Oedipus*, where Deleuze and Guattari, nor their editors, nor their German translators have left Jackson out, and worse still where the English translators have left us with an enticing and foreboding gap, we reach the navel. If theory itself has a navel in Freud's sense, then what is theory itself? And if a gap shaped like Blackness--or Blackness shaped like a gap--sits at the heart of the pulse of theory, the move from nowhere, what it disavows is crucial. Theory fundamentally and necessarily disallows and prohibits the

theoretical intervention of Jackson, and of those who seize upon the possibility of Black insurrection. This structure bars the turn and the grasping of the weapon, putting these moves out of the frame of action, banishing them from theory's symbolic structures. Even as one knows something has to be done that move is left as a tangle of images, words, pulses, with empty space right at the center. We encounter the impasse of Western theory. We are suddenly, if the metaphor holds, out of time, without negation, faced with the thudding drumbeat of the drive of western metaphysics forged in the subjection, violation, capture and demands no action, no insurrection. This is the "primal scene" of western philosophy, no matter the time, the forging of its unconscious as one that is latent with the black imago, and George Jackson whose poems of love and combat explicitly call for the hyperbolic ocean of violence that could make the world stop.

Endnotes

1. See Taija McDougall "Left Out: Notes on Absence, Nothingness and the Black Prisoner Theorist," *Anthurium* vol. 15, no. 2 (2019).
2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. London, UK: The Athlone Press, 1977, 77.
3. *Ibid.* 277.
4. *Ibid.* 4.
5. *Ibid.* 139.
6. *Ibid.* 135.
7. *Ibid.* 67.
8. *Ibid.* 277.
9. *Ibid.* 278.
10. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York, USA: Vintage Books, 1977, 288.
11. Gilles Deleuze & Claire Parnet, "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature" in *Dialogues II*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam. New York, USA: Columbia University Press, 1987, 27.
12. *Ibid.* 28.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Deleuze & Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*. 40.
15. Michelle Koerner. "Line of Escape: Gilles Deleuze's Encounter with George Jackson," *Genre* Vol 44, no. 2 (2011), 161.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.* Jean Genet, "Introduction to the First Edition" in *Soledad Brother*. Trans. Richard Howard. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books. 331-339.
18. Brian Massumi, "Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements" in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, USA: Univerisity of Minnesota Press, 1980, xvi.
19. I choose 'invoke' consciously; while I will not claim that Deleuze, with his collaborators, appropriate Jackson's thought necessarily, they allow Jackson to be minimally material considering they do not cite him in the bibliographic endnotes. They conjure Jackson forth to make a point, and Koerner notes that this is a procedure that occurs throughout *Anti-Oedipus*. Whereas she writes that these are a series of deployments that can be termed variously, with Jackson, this categorization rings false, particularly when confronted with the apposition of Jackson's thought in Deleuze's work.
20. George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. Chicago, USA: Lawrence Hill Books, 1970, 328.
21. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrenie*. Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1980, 250

22. Deleuze & Parnet. "Anglo American Literature." 27.
23. Jeremy Matthew Glick, "Aphoristic Lines of Flight in *The Coming* Insurrection: Ironiees of Forgetting yet Forging the Past—An anamnesis for George Jackson," *Situations*, vol.4, no.2, (Spring 2012), 106.
24. It is appropriate to call Jackson a shadow in Deleuze's work, not quite there except to take a warning shot and disappear again, menacing in the best ways. I do not mean 'shadow' here to denote a following or less than, but to shade the ghost. Jackson's absence is predicated on Deleuze's presence, a deeply uneasy symbiosis, a parasitism.
25. Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 328.
26. George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*. Baltimore, USA: Black Classic Press, 1972, 1.
27. *Ibid*. 22.
28. Deleuze & Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*. 311, 15.
29. Jackson. *Blood in My Eye*. 22.
30. *Ibid.* 16.
31. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1980, 204.
32. Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 277; Jackson. *Soledad Brother*, 328.
33. Paul Moyaert, "The Death Drive and the Nucleus of the Ego: An Introduction to Freudian Metaphysics," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 51 (2013), 97.
34. David Marriott, "Judging Fanon." *Rhizomes*, iss. 29 (2016); Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 112, no. 4 (2013), 737-780.
35. Jackson, *Soledad Brother*. 308.
36. Marriott, "Judging Fanon."
37. Jackson, *Soledad Brother,* 313, 312.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid*. 328.
40. *Ibid.* 250.
41. *Ibid.* 211.
42. Jared Sexton, Private Conversation, 29 November 2018.
43. Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 47; 50.
44. Shoshana Felman, "The Originality of Jacques Lacan." *Poetics Today*, vol. 2:1b, (1980/81), 45-57; Jackson, *Blood in My Eye,* 82, 186.
45. Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*, 183.
46. Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 233.
47. Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*. New York City, USA: Columbia University Press, 1990, 6.
48. Deleuze & Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*. 311.
49. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. James Strachey. New York City, USA: Basic Books, 2010 [1900], 528.

poised in hover hours

Asiya Wadud

the hand
does the
work

my hands or
a labor of love

or
a labor of dexterous
want

both hands act in credence
to work all the palms' grit
to see what remains
what remnants the palms insist
what their lifelines etch
ragged as these last revenants

may come as off-kilter
revelry now and askance

my hands grazed the work
rested in preparation for

gentle mastery of
deference
and seven salt-filmed waters

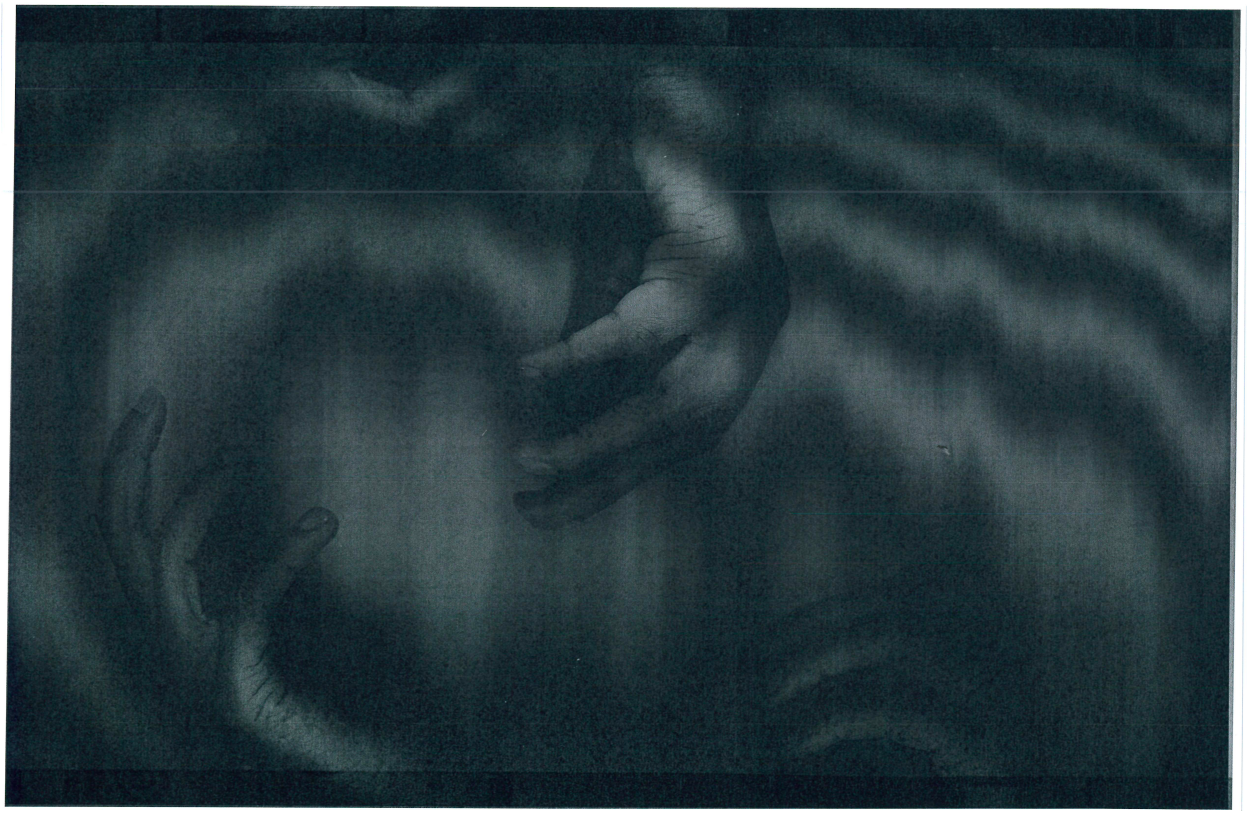
I touched the velvet-rimmed —
fissured

its autumn, moss-gold pleasure

in a labor
of love

my hands
grazed the blue green algae

I took care to remove
what was noxious
but most of all took
care not to drink it



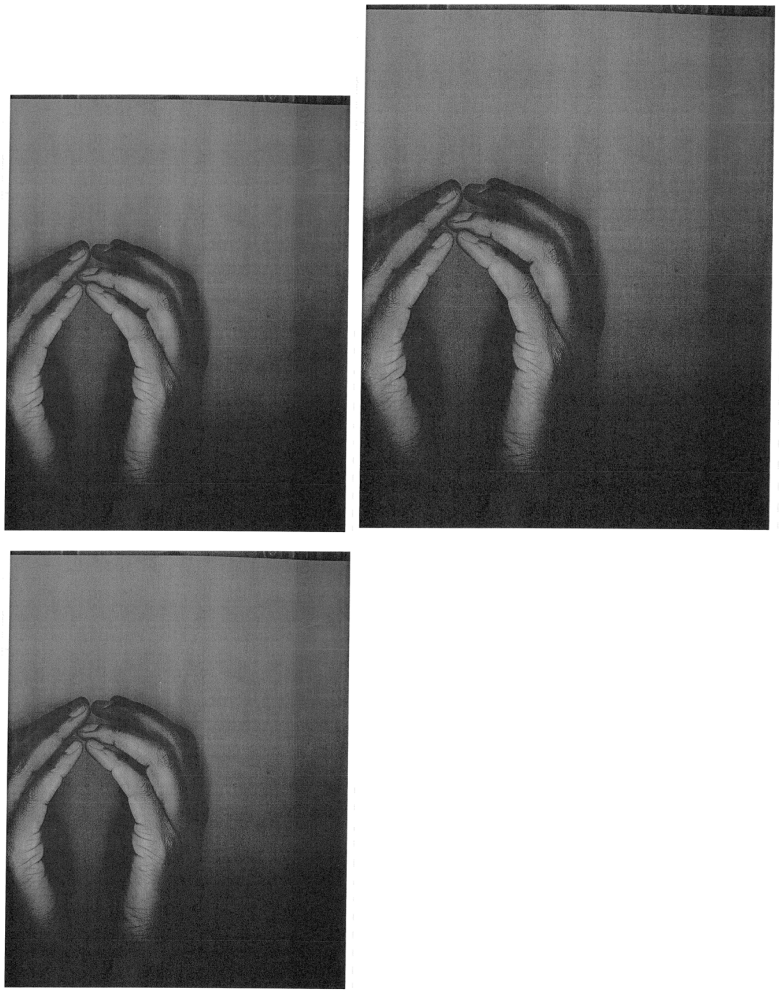
skimmed the surface to get
a better look
netted all the algae
the net capitulated to poison
it took the bloom, the burden
it understood the rupture
its descent was threefold — palmoil, lament, still surface
each its own proliferation

in the freshwater
I declared what lack
of buoyancy. in

the salt water I noted
the preservation

or call it the labor
of containment
how every limb

lay lifted
everything in me hovered at the
surface



cupped my hands — hold the
water. cupped hands
creature a tapered fissure

the Camargue sunset passes
through the fingers' gaps
split fingers show us what
futures

the hand does the
work. I promote its precision—
the singular fingerprints

cupped at my mouth the
hands now act as echo chamber

palm outstretched
is a patient gesture
a lung's cavity another still
presence

all together I have
10 fingers

my hands have done a workload
plaster hands fused together
my index fingers meeting
all incremental knowledge
same as the salt water
each minute builds as a chorus
hour then hours

my hands didn't touch the
blue-green algae. I know that
it's noxious and I didn't want
any trouble

I am ambivalent about the
future on the one hand
there are more bodies of water
my other hand cups the
Camargue salt water

hungry knowledge is an
overture
handed knowledge
a labor of love or the structured work of want

the hand does
the work
the Camargue presses us
the landscapes rather dividend saltpeter to say the future
saltpeter to say what preserves us

Untimely Dispatch From the Middle of Nowhere 24

John Murillo III

There
is nowhere
like this place, and
no time
like the present.

We work with the shards of Black life and death that called out to us because we knew and know that the critical, caring, and perilous work we need to do is bound up with destruction. These fragments of Black life and death surrounding us affirm our sense of our own untimeliness against the neatness of time, and of our stankiness in the middle of nowhere.

I have written elsewhere and at length about what I am calling "untime," which describes the dereliction of Black temporality, and about "stankiness,"[1] the defining characteristic of the nowhere of Black spatiality. The untimeliness that signals our destructive relationship to human models and experiences of time and the stankiness that signals our destructive relationship to human spaces and spatiality act as the Black *prima materia*, the Black and essential material, with which we must work to create these impossible stories we imagine, witness, bear, conjure, and live in and against the antiblack cosmos where and when we cannot *be*. What we knew, and now know with excruciating intimacy, to be the violent, distorted fabric of spacetime shaping the field of fragments around us *is* the material we must bend to create Black pocket universes from streets to pages (and everywhere and when between). We knew and know that in order to conjure Black spacetimes that might upend the antiblack cosmos, we would have to become avatars of destruction, able to bend the forces of untimeliness and stankiness and love toward the kinds of authentic upheaval that *must* be born if we are to save the *earth* and conjure the impossible story of a wholly unimaginable *world*.

Wherever and whenever we've ended up, *nowhere* is better or more apropos, and we've got *no time* to celebrate. We wordly wanderers wander wondering about the possibility of other worlds, word worlds that would warp and rend and otherwise radically reimagine the fabric of spacetime, especially since we understand the ways that our pain, terror, and subjection stitch that fabric together. We traverse the perilous folds in space and wrinkles in time in search of the fragments of a

theory of Black spacetime because we recognized that understanding not only how time and space tear Black life, death, and creation absolutely asunder, but also how Black life, death, and creation unsettle and upend time and space,[2] would be essential if we aimed to take time and make space for Black folk, in theory, in word, and in deed.

Our many lingering questions about the actual possibilities of Black creation are the connective force arranging the field of these fragmented, impossible stories we sought out and that sought us out, that we write and we tell, around us. For Jasmine, Shakara, Dajerria, Sandra, Kalief, Nephi, for my students across time and space, for my wife and my family, and for all the Black folk living and dying untimely lives and deaths in the middle of nowhere, these questions illuminate the path forward, propel and direct the vector of our imaginative journey, and shape our vision of a destination. Asking how we have marshaled, do marshal, and might better marshal the violent energy of our spatiotemporal dereliction and transmute it into the creative, caring energy required to conjure moments and sites for Black folk to disturb the air with our breath opens us into a serious consideration of the stakes and potentiality of Black creation. Our visitations with Black words and worlds created and lived by Black folk allow us to advance this consideration and to move ourselves toward taking the leap into the wholly Black black hole of it all.

Ultimately, our leap leads us to recognize that to make the arrangements, conjure ways out of no way, and take and make time when there is none to spare is to engage in dangerous work—and not in the least because the work tends to draw the fire, bullets, terror, and domination of the antiblack world, its institutions, and its agents;[3] we work with volatile material, this stuff of untimely death and destruction, and this stank of nowhere, so we must negotiate how we imperil ourselves and the variously dead and living Black folk for whom we care. How we handle the forces that destroy us, that remove us from a subject position—that is, from a stable location relative to space and time—has significant import for us because our handling of these forces will impact those who encounter the creations we destructively produce.

How we alchemically transmute destruction determines the shape the product takes and the effects it might have on those for whom we endeavored to create it. How we treat this material across each step of the process of alchemical creation affects what form that material is able to take. Alchemy functions as a useful frame for this process because it requires the dissolution or destruction of our *prima materia*, our original material, as a necessary and *first* step toward the creation of something else. Nigredo, alchemy's first step, signifies blackness and requires the dissolution of our source material, compelling us to think about how we break our material down to its volatile essential components. Albedo, alchemy's second step, signifies whiteness and requires the distillation of the usable from what nigredo produces, compelling us to consider how we scrub clean or purify what we can or want to use of that material. And rubedo, alchemy's final step,[4] signifies redness

and results in the synthesis of the fabled philosopher stone itself, compels us to consider how we alter and synthesize that destructive force into a radically different product. Alchemical transmutation is the process of radical breaking-apart/disordering, reorganization, and creation. When we think of Black creation, especially when that creation is inherently a 'working-with-fragments,' we must think (and have thought) about the ways we handle these fragments throughout the complex process of transmutation under untimely, spatially dislocated conditions.

This is a good way of thinking about what has been the subject *and* the work of the kind of impossible invention Black folk (vie to) perform: on the one hand, we spend pages trying to think about how this process works (its mechanics) and to what ends (its stakes and possibilities); on the other, we spend pages performing this work by unraveling the entanglement of Blackness, spacetime, care, and creation, extracting what is essential to this entanglement, and producing a theory of Black untimely creation out of nowhere. Across genres, styles, disciplines, and paradigmatic divides marked by woefully inadequate names, written account of a difficult and dangerous transmutation. Working with and through our destructive relationship with the fabric of the cosmos produces what we understand to be an essential contradiction of Black creative work: in this cosmos, our untimeliness and our displacement are *constitutive to* our capacities to make time or take a minute, and to make space or find our way; that which destroys our relationship to time, space, and each other remains inextricably bound up with our creative aspiration and imaginative aim. We knew this, and we know this, and we have created, and do and will continue to create under these conditions.

Fragment 117
Destructive Writing, and Fragmented Work

How
to tell
a
shattered
story?[5]
What is required to…tell an impossible story?[6]
I do not know
when or how else
to begin,
but I do know that
each and
e ver y ***Black*** *frag ment*
matters

Here are the fragments put together by another me[7]

The cord of cowrie shells drags across the polished dark wood of the floor beneath her feet, tracing a constellation through the small nodes of water she arranged before us. M. NourbeSe Philip conjures a liquid narrative arc from the watery remnants of the lost words and names, bodies and souls, and untimely timelines of Black lives lost at sea as she performs selections from *Zong!* for we who sought to bear water and witness.

Clamoring cowrie shells clatter a rhythm for our guided collective recollection. Like the beautiful fragments of shells to which she was condemned to beaches to search, they are their own w/holes, and their arrangement along the snaking cord traces the coordinate field of the event horizon that she asks us to cross. The wet drag of heavy, shelled rope through water scratch-splash-crashes above a low rumble, the drumroll of tidal forces altering the fabric of the small, dark cosmos of the theater. Overwhelming, oceanic, Black, chant, song, dance, breath, wake, word, and work warp, wrinkle, and collapse into one another. We get lost in the riff, rift, and riptide of the performance, rhythmically called by shell fragments to where and when the lost might be.[8] In the cosmic Black magic being conjured, uncertainty is our familiar.

Zong! is M. NourbeSe Philip playing with fragments, a poiesis of destructive means and ends. There are orders of fragments at play, here, and play is only possible under the parameters set by Philip in an agreement with the limitations of the archive brokered by the 150 Black folk thrown overboard. The first order is comprised of the narrative bits of Black life and death that make up, but will always fail to fully add up to, the 150 souls lost beneath the waves. The second order is established by the fragmentary (and figmentary) nature of the available, historical account—the insurance claim and the court case. To become both magician and censor, the poet locks herself inside the limits of the available archive of the legal case, *Gregson v. Gilbert*, attempting to inhabit the same conditions endured by the slaves aboard the Zong/Zorgue. Sequestering herself to the language of the available record means situating herself in the "dysgraphia" characteristic of every untimely narrative fragment—of the Black lives thrown overboard from the deck of the Zong, of those left to die on a dinghy in the Mediterranean,[9] of all of us. The "dysgraphia: the inability of language to cohere around the bodies and the suffering of [we] Black people who live and die in the wake and whose everyday acts insist Black life into the wake"[10] is the condition of possibility for Philips's magic. *Incoherence* makes her form of spellcasting—or *spelling*—possible. We read, we watch, and we are caught in the derangement of the spell.

The story of the *Zong*, the story that the dead demand to be told, can only be 'un-told,' or told in a deranged way by "re-presenting the sequence" of signs and symbols that index the available information. The writing becomes its own process of disfigurement and the process produces the second order of fragments: the language. The falling, failing, ripped-apartness of language, as an echo of the "seared, divided, ripped-apartness" of the "primary narrative" of Black flesh, becomes the

manifestation of this destructive "praxis" and "theory," "text for living and for dying, and…method for [writing] them both."[11] Spacing the words out and exploding their letters into the unintelligible disarray littering the pages of *Zong!* produces imaginative and physical strain. Eyes arrhythmically fail to track the lexical debris across, up, and down pages of the text, and the lack of an orthographic anchor subjects the imagination to a form of interpretive disorientation. The difference in legibility produced by a creative process that depends on the disfigurement of language and the refusal to impose meaning jettisons writer, reader, and witness into a state of imaginative vertigo.

M. NourbeSe Philip as Black poet, censor, and magician becomes something like a poetic Galactus: a Black cosmic entity and destroyer of words and worlds; a sentient, vigilant black hole in search of something in excess of meaning and sense, an "underlying current" subtending all that is written and all that the written account could ever mean. Against grammar, the "mechanism of force" structurally imposed onto the available language as symbolic order—the order of ideas, knowledge, and imaginations that ceaselessly and repeatedly murders Black beings—and the Black dysgraphia such grammar allows, Philip mutilates and disorders language, "literally [cutting] it into pieces, castrating verbs, suffocating adjectives, murdering nouns, throwing articles, prepositions, conjunctions overboard, jettisoning adverbs…[separating] subject from verb, verb from object—[creating] semantic *mayhem*" in the name of "reaching into the stinking, eviscerated innards…and [reading] the untold story that tells itself by not telling." This "not-telling" is both vengeful and protective. It is vengeful because it is aimed at mutilating, jettisoning, murdering, suffocating, castrating, cutting, and exploding the archive *in the same way* the archive mutilates, jettisons, murders, suffocates, castrates, cuts and explodes Black being. And it is protective because Philip recognizes the need to avoid subjecting the dead "to new dangers and to a second order of violence," one that not only affirms the violence of the grammar that imposes meaning and structure, but *reproduces* that violence (by 'maintaining order')—and this is a need recognized by Hartman, Spillers, Sharpe, myself, and countless others who know the perils of bearing fragmented witness and water.

Alchemically transmuting fragments is, in one sense, a form of violent play, a form of derangement and disorder that playfully transforms the violence that *made* them fragments into a form of violence that can challenge, or outright disintegrate, the symbolic order. Thinking in these terms frames Philip's creative praxis as a form of offense. In this light, Philip poetically plays with language in order to conjure an assault on the normative constraints of language, grammar, and knowledge. Philip works with the lexical, political, and metaphysical refuse of the lost and dead Black folk thrown overboard by first recognizing them as such—as refuse, as effluvium, as whatever one might call the end product of spaghettification—and then by subjecting them to a form of destructively creative and creatively destructive alchemy that transmutes the violence that produced this refuse into

something that attempts to dispose of the symbolic order and all its attendant limits. The organizing principle or grammar by which the antiblack fictions of the archive comes to be faces annihilation in the form of a poiesis that turns its refuse against itself.[12] Reanimated[13] or ghostly[14] or deathly,[15] the variously dead resurge in the breaks of word and meaning, and usher in an imaginative form of warfare waged *at* and *against* the limits of creative possibility imposed by the symbolic order that made Black folk deathly in the first place.

Alchemically transmuting fragments is also a means toward manifesting a ward, a protection. This frames Philip's writing as a form of defense. Philip flings out and disperses the lexical and semantic remnants scatters the broken words into a shifting, protective arrangement. Each poem, each section of the poems, and the Black w/hole collection of poetry comprise an amalgamated force field of fragments. Warped by the tidal forces of gravity beyond their composite barrier, the untimely, stanky force suturing the shards to one another undulates, shifting the spaces between the letters, words, names, and utterances that comprise *Zong!* All meaning and order violently imposed from without faces inevitable obliteration should it venture beyond this waving event horizon of the Black w/hole of the text. The promise of annihilating incoherence and the embrace and weaponization of fragmentation, dysgraphia, and illegibility provide a destructive defense. To "defend the dead," Philips-qua-poet-qua-magician-qua-alchemist-qua-tactician marshals an absolute power cosmic that inheres in *destruction*.

In its adherence to working with fragments, to accepting the absoluteness of fragmentation and the centrality of it to Black creative work, *Zong!*'s destructive approach to creation offers us a name for what it is we might best do with our untimeliness in the middle of nowhere: *destructive writing*. M. NourbeSe Philip's poiesis is destruction. To leap into the Black w/hole of the text, the praxis, the theory, and the interpretive method necessary to operate on the same frequency of this work is to take very seriously the untimely, stanky, political-ontological relationship between Blackness, creation, and destruction. To "make generations" in the name of defending the dead, or to do the wake work, or to conjure the Black and cosmic magic, is to reckon with the paradoxical generativeness of destruction. It is to wholly embrace violence as violence, fragments as fragments, and incoherence as incoherence, in order to actively refuse, combat, and vie to destroy the very logic, or grammar, or order that murdered, continues to murder, and threatens to wholly obliterate Black being, or whatever deranged fragments of that being remain.

What have we done? What have we been doing? What should—*must*—we do? As we reflect upon the shards of thought, language, literary scene, physical property, lived experience, and unbearable inquiry that form the field of fragments we call Black Study, we consider how these arrangements we have made have all been an attempt at working with destruction. Arranging and deranging, ordering, reordering, and disordering, and always looking, listening, and attending to them carefully has always been the product of a continuous negotiation of the destructive

forces that turned Black life and death into fragments. We spent our textual spacetime theorizing the nature of these forces in order to both, understand how they destroy us (how they work), and to begin to consider what ways we might refract/reflect them (how we can create with and from them). My arguments have turned on establishing the significance or rethinking these spatiotemporal forces and how they shatter our existences, indeed because rethinking time and space and how they play out upon us as a project on its own will help us better grasp the nature of our subjection to the various orders and structures of the antiblack world, but also because a deeper understanding of their mechanics and their essence radically transforms how we imagine, theorize, and perform Black creation.

I/we have performed our impossible alchemy thusly: (nigredo) disintegrate our core materials—time, space, and work—shedding the ashen detritus inessential to our work and leaving only what we need; (albedo) the distillation of what remains—untime, nowhere, and refraction—into the material we can synthesize into a greater conceptualization; and (rubedo) the synthesization of a new, vexing, abstract material that might reshape our understanding of Black existence and imaginative creation—destructive writing. While we knew and know our work aims to *produce* an alternative theory of Black creation that *embraces* and *works with* the destructive forces that make us untimely and displace us into nowhere, we perhaps (re)discover that our work *is* its own negotiation of destruction, our own staging of these principles of destructive writing. That invisible force suturing the fragments surrounding us into a field, that unseen thing that amplified the call of the fragments we sought out and were able to hold and behold, that animating element of untimeliness, refraction, and being nowhere: that undergirds the whole of this work, argumentatively and creatively, is *destruction*, and in our endeavor to make time and space for our considerations, we contemplate and imagine and write toward an answer to our most difficult set of questions.

How to tell a shattered story, one not meant to be passed on or *passed* on? How to "un-tell" a story that must be told?[16] How to tell an impossible story?

Perhaps it is not exactly as Sharpe says. Perhaps the goal is not to 'imagine the unimaginable"[17] but, as part of the same refusal NourbeSe writes and performs, to radically un-imagine the imaginable.

How to defend the dead, the dying, and *we* who live untimely lives in the middle of nowhere?

By

becoming

everybody?

No.

By destroying everything.

Cowrie shells drag across the hard, wet wood. A constellation has been traced in water. A spell has been cast. A conjuring has taken place. We bear the water and the witness. We are a clamor of fragments in the oceanic dark.

Telling and writing impossible stories is destructive work. Telling, writing, and living impossible stories is destructive, dangerous work when deathliness, untimeliness, and stankiness are the conditions of whenever and wherever we try to be. To really listen to Ursa Corregidora's blues[18] and take the leap into the Black hole toward total destruction is to leap toward the singular possibility of radical, unimaginable, and impossible creation. Only in the dark and clamoring shatter, only from the nowhere of there and the untimeliness of then, might we really make time and space for one another.

Nothing less, nowhere else, and with no time to spare, we leap.

Endnotes

1. This is from my analysis of both Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* and Frank B. Wilderson III's "Do I Stank, or Was it Already Stanky in Here?" For more on stankiness, read the Third Arrangement of my forthcoming *Impossible Stories: On the Space and Time of Black Destructive Creation* (The Ohio State University Press, 2021).
2. There are a few good visual analogs/metaphors that I think of as I write this line. One would be the image of the Incredible Hulk fighting the Juggernaut during the World War Hulk storyline of Marvel comics. The Juggernaut, whose connection to the rage demon/deity, Cyttorak, affords him the ability to become physically unstoppable once he's gained enough momentum, confronts the Incredible Hulk who seeks revenge for being exiled to the far reaches of outer space. The Incredible Hulk merely redirects the Juggernaut's momentum, casting him aside and allowing him to 'unstoppably' fly off elsewhere. Another would be how the universe of *Fullmetal Alchemist* characterizes alchemy as transmutation derived from an equivalent exchange: whatever the material being manipulated, the energy required for the manipulation depends on an equivalent exchange made by the alchemist. There are dangers to this process, and there are forbidden forms of transmutation for which the offering is either impossible to produce, or the exchange cannot possibly be made equivalent (e.g. transmuting a human life/soul). These, I think, are the ways Blackness manipulates the force of the antiblack cosmos.
3. I really want us to think of the ongoing disappearances and deaths of several activists from the Ferguson protests in 2014 and beyond, as well as the deaths of their friends and family members as I mention this—most recently, the supposed suicide of Danye Jones reminds us of the ways the antiblack world seeks out and destroys those who would dare to confront it.
4. In alchemy, the Great Work or the Magnum Opus names the process of working with the prima materia, the first matter or essential matter, to create the fabled philosopher's stone, which in *Fullmetal Alchemist* promises the ability to transmute anything without adhering to the principle of equivalent exchange, there are 3 steps (condensed from an original 4 steps): nigredo; albedo; and rubedo (which was previously preceded by citrinitas, but this step was consolidated with rubedo).
5. This question comes from Arundhati Roy's novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. It is a poem engraved onto a tombstone, and it characterizes the framing and plot of the novel beautifully. I was moved by the question, as well as the full poem, especially since it resonates so powerfully with what I've been thinking about across all of my work, especially in *Impossible Stories*, and what I think we've been thinking about in/across all Black Study.
6. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* vol. 26 (2008), 10.

7. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008, 89. The Markmann translation reads a bit differently: "Now the fragments have been put together by another self" (82). I prefer the one I play with here.
8. Philip, "Fugues, Fragments, and Fissures," 2-3.
9. Vivienne Walt, "Migrants Left to Die on the High Seas Continue to Haunt NATO," *TIME*, 17 April 2012.
10. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*: On Blackness and Being. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 96.
11. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Diacritics vol. 17, no. 2 (1987), 67-8. I make this parallel after reading a line from Sharpe's *In the Wake* that introduces *Zong!* thusly: "It is in and with such falling, such ripping-apart, of language that *Zong!* begins.
12. M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008, 196.
13. I have elsewhere described untime, or Black untimeliness, as "a zombified force and feature of Black being in the antiblack cosmos."
14. See (at least): Toni Morrison's *Beloved*; Angela Fluornoy's *The Turner House*; and, Natashia Deón's *Grace*.
15. I'm conjuring "deathliness" from "Ice Cold," the afterword to David Marriott's *Haunted Life*: *Visual Culture and Black Modernity.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007.
16. Philip's *Zong!* culminates in a "Notanda" we have cited throughout this conclusion, and one of the most intriguing, if not completely vexing, conceptualizations comes in the form of "un-telling" the story of the Zong massacre, and how this "un-telling" became the way Philip framed her destructive, archival, poetic work. I conjure that labor and her insistence upon this work here.
17. Christina Sharpe, "Black Studies: In the Wake," *The Black Scholar* vol. 44, no. 2 (2014), 59.
18. My own analysis of Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* reads Ursa Corregidora's blues singing in relation to the blueshift phenomenon and to black holes; her call, or the call of her blues, is a call for a leap toward the kind of total spaghettification or obliteration that comes from approaching black holes. This analysis appears in full in the second chapter of my forthcoming text, *Impossible Stories: On the Space and Time of Black Destructive Creation*.

Spinning on Blackness

Nicholas Brady

> It is important to remember that blackness is defined here in terms of social relationality rather than identity; thus blackness incorporates subjects normatively defined as black, the relations among blacks, whites and others, and the practices that produce racial difference. Blackness marks a social relationship of dominance and abjection and potentially one of redress and emancipation; it is a contested figure at the very center of social struggle.
>
> —Saidiya Hartman

> This door is really the door of dreams. This existence in the Diaspora is like that— dreams from which one never wakes…Captured in one's own body, in one's own thoughts to be out of possession of one's mind; our cognitive schema is captivity.
>
> —Dionne Brand

Performance is an elusive object, always on the move, creating encounters against the technologies that assign meaning and value. In all of its etymological roots, performance is tied to an act of "doing," such as doing something to completion, to make, to construct, or to bring about. Performance is not only in the present, but it is an object that continues to move, circulate, and run away from the very performance of writing and other technologies of capture. From this view, performance studies can be viewed as a violent endeavor, an attempt to capture that which is free, to bind within its pages that which is attempting to elude its grasp. Yet, performance as an object transforms those who study it: "Just as performance is contingent, contested, hard to pin down, so too is its study."[1] The performance is not simply an object, but a "co-subject" that moves alongside the movement of the studier of performance. It is this *subjectively* disorienting practice that is the challenge and the "rush" of studying performance.[2]

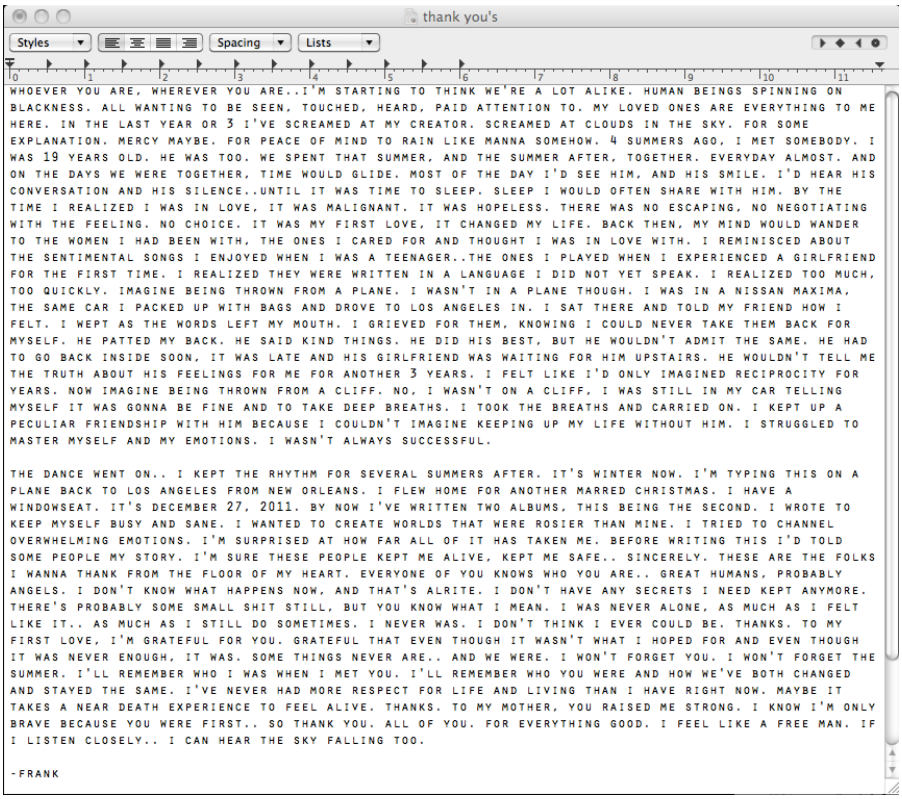
Black performance theory brings this concern with movement and disorientation to the study of black life by "offer[ing] a way to rethink performance theory… within the context of a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, homophobic society."[3] The mobility exuded by black performers in different arenas was not an expression of free play, but a struggle with incredibly repressive violence. The fact that the black body *moves* is a very serious matter to consider given the enormity of the violence that it gesticulates into, moves through, and emerges out of.[4] Against the methods of reading the body as a text, Brown theorizes the body as a three-dimensional object-of-analysis that is not simply "seen," but moves on its own. Brown writes that bodies "can be commercialized, yet they are incapable of being owned. They are by definition public and collective, yet they can also be

intensely private, articulations of a bodily interiority."[5] Brown points us to the way that performance can be a heuristic for mediating between public systems that imposed meaning on the body and the way the body produces meaning for itself through movement.

With this in mind, this paper will explore this relationship between performance and publicity by investigating the discourse around Frank Ocean's Tumblr note of his first love. Hundreds of articles, thousands of words, millions of hits, shares, and retweets tried to locate the truth of Frank Ocean's sexuality, yet all of these writings further buried him. Our analysis shares a suspicion of E. Patrick Johnson's that "performance may not fully account for the ontology of race," specifically blackness.[6] This "ontology of race" is not the imposition of a metaphysical theory, but a particular understanding of being that is neither essentialist nor anti-essentialist. This particular inhabitation of essence can be described as a "third term" that is a radical *desedimentation* of this "fixed entity."[7] This is in the service of trying to figure out the relationship between "self-invention" (the *subject of performance*) and "dispossession" (the *force of blackness)*. From this we may ask further, can performance as a concept ever clarify what the ontology of blackness *is*? What does performance point us to as it may lead us away from this ontology? Can what performance point us to – in its elusive movements away from such an ontology – potentially outline the contours of what we may call a "political ontology" of blackness?[8] These questions will take us through an exploration of Butler's concept of performativity and Hartman entanglement of "performance" and "performativity" so that we may re-audition Frank Ocean's poetics of "humanity spinning on blackness" given to us in his Tumblr post. In moving through these thoughts, this paper will perform a critical (dis)orientation of thinking about performance's entanglement with the terror and pleasure of blackness.

I.

In 2012, Frank Ocean's listening party for his debut album generated publicity for something other than the quality of the album, *Channel Orange*. Several reporters focused on three songs from the album ("Bad Religion," "Pink Matter," and "Forrest Gump") that seemed to sing about relationships with a person with he/him pronouns. Instead of focusing attention on the music itself, it led to a firestorm of interest in Ocean's personal life. Across a diversity of media—from Complex Magazine to BBC news—journalists questioned the status of Frank Ocean's sexuality and what it could mean for both American popular culture and Hip Hop culture. Within two days, Ocean decided to respond to the noise instead of waiting for the official release of the album. On July 4, Frank Ocean released a post on Tumblr detailing his first love with a man a few summers ago. The prose was broken up in a few paragraphs and was stylistically placed in a frame designed like the software application named TextEdit.


thank you's

Styles Spacing Lists

WHOEVER YOU ARE, WHEREVER YOU ARE..I'M STARTING TO THINK WE'RE A LOT ALIKE. HUMAN BEINGS SPINNING ON BLACKNESS. ALL WANTING TO BE SEEN, TOUCHED, HEARD, PAID ATTENTION TO. MY LOVED ONES ARE EVERYTHING TO ME HERE. IN THE LAST YEAR OR 3 I'VE SCREAMED AT MY CREATOR. SCREAMED AT CLOUDS IN THE SKY. FOR SOME EXPLANATION. MERCY MAYBE. FOR PEACE OF MIND TO RAIN LIKE MANNA SOMEHOW. 4 SUMMERS AGO, I MET SOMEBODY. I WAS 19 YEARS OLD. HE WAS TOO. WE SPENT THAT SUMMER, AND THE SUMMER AFTER, TOGETHER. EVERYDAY ALMOST. AND ON THE DAYS WE WERE TOGETHER, TIME WOULD GLIDE. MOST OF THE DAY I'D SEE HIM, AND HIS SMILE. I'D HEAR HIS CONVERSATION AND HIS SILENCE..UNTIL IT WAS TIME TO SLEEP. SLEEP I WOULD OFTEN SHARE WITH HIM. BY THE TIME I REALIZED I WAS IN LOVE, IT WAS MALIGNANT. IT WAS HOPELESS. THERE WAS NO ESCAPING, NO NEGOTIATING WITH THE FEELING. NO CHOICE. IT WAS MY FIRST LOVE, IT CHANGED MY LIFE. BACK THEN, MY MIND WOULD WANDER TO THE WOMEN I HAD BEEN WITH, THE ONES I CARED FOR AND THOUGHT I WAS IN LOVE WITH. I REMINISCED ABOUT THE SENTIMENTAL SONGS I ENJOYED WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER..THE ONES I PLAYED WHEN I EXPERIENCED A GIRLFRIEND FOR THE FIRST TIME. I REALIZED THEY WERE WRITTEN IN A LANGUAGE I DID NOT YET SPEAK. I REALIZED TOO MUCH, TOO QUICKLY. IMAGINE BEING THROWN FROM A PLANE. I WASN'T IN A PLANE THOUGH. I WAS IN A NISSAN MAXIMA, THE SAME CAR I PACKED UP WITH BAGS AND DROVE TO LOS ANGELES IN. I SAT THERE AND TOLD MY FRIEND HOW I FELT. I WEPT AS THE WORDS LEFT MY MOUTH. I GRIEVED FOR THEM, KNOWING I COULD NEVER TAKE THEM BACK FOR MYSELF. HE PATTED MY BACK. HE SAID KIND THINGS. HE DID HIS BEST, BUT HE WOULDN'T ADMIT THE SAME. HE HAD TO GO BACK INSIDE SOON, IT WAS LATE AND HIS GIRLFRIEND WAS WAITING FOR HIM UPSTAIRS. HE WOULDN'T TELL ME THE TRUTH ABOUT HIS FEELINGS FOR ME FOR ANOTHER 3 YEARS. I FELT LIKE I'D ONLY IMAGINED RECIPROCITY FOR YEARS. NOW IMAGINE BEING THROWN FROM A CLIFF. NO, I WASN'T ON A CLIFF, I WAS STILL IN MY CAR TELLING MYSELF IT WAS GONNA BE FINE AND TO TAKE DEEP BREATHS. I TOOK THE BREATHS AND CARRIED ON. I KEPT UP A PECULIAR FRIENDSHIP WITH HIM BECAUSE I COULDN'T IMAGINE KEEPING UP MY LIFE WITHOUT HIM. I STRUGGLED TO MASTER MYSELF AND MY EMOTIONS. I WASN'T ALWAYS SUCCESSFUL.

THE DANCE WENT ON.. I KEPT THE RHYTHM FOR SEVERAL SUMMERS AFTER. IT'S WINTER NOW. I'M TYPING THIS ON A PLANE BACK TO LOS ANGELES FROM NEW ORLEANS. I FLEW HOME FOR ANOTHER MARRED CHRISTMAS. I HAVE A WINDOWSEAT. IT'S DECEMBER 27, 2011. BY NOW I'VE WRITTEN TWO ALBUMS, THIS BEING THE SECOND. I WROTE TO KEEP MYSELF BUSY AND SANE. I WANTED TO CREATE WORLDS THAT WERE ROSIER THAN MINE. I TRIED TO CHANNEL OVERWHELMING EMOTIONS. I'M SURPRISED AT HOW FAR ALL OF IT HAS TAKEN ME. BEFORE WRITING THIS I'D TOLD SOME PEOPLE MY STORY. I'M SURE THESE PEOPLE KEPT ME ALIVE, KEPT ME SAFE.. SINCERELY. THESE ARE THE FOLKS I WANNA THANK FROM THE FLOOR OF MY HEART. EVERYONE OF YOU KNOWS WHO YOU ARE.. GREAT HUMANS, PROBABLY ANGELS. I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENS NOW, AND THAT'S ALRITE. I DON'T HAVE ANY SECRETS I NEED KEPT ANYMORE. THERE'S PROBABLY SOME SMALL SHIT STILL, BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. I WAS NEVER ALONE, AS MUCH AS I FELT LIKE IT.. AS MUCH AS I STILL DO SOMETIMES. I NEVER WAS. I DON'T THINK I EVER COULD BE. THANKS. TO MY FIRST LOVE, I'M GRATEFUL FOR YOU. GRATEFUL THAT EVEN THOUGH IT WASN'T WHAT I HOPED FOR AND EVEN THOUGH IT WAS NEVER ENOUGH, IT WAS. SOME THINGS NEVER ARE.. AND WE WERE. I WON'T FORGET YOU. I WON'T FORGET THE SUMMER. I'LL REMEMBER WHO I WAS WHEN I MET YOU. I'LL REMEMBER WHO YOU WERE AND HOW WE'VE BOTH CHANGED AND STAYED THE SAME. I'VE NEVER HAD MORE RESPECT FOR LIFE AND LIVING THAN I HAVE RIGHT NOW. MAYBE IT TAKES A NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE TO FEEL ALIVE. THANKS. TO MY MOTHER, YOU RAISED ME STRONG. I KNOW I'M ONLY BRAVE BECAUSE YOU WERE FIRST.. SO THANK YOU. ALL OF YOU. FOR EVERYTHING GOOD. I FEEL LIKE A FREE MAN. IF I LISTEN CLOSELY.. I CAN HEAR THE SKY FALLING TOO.

-FRANK

Ocean would later comment that he planned to release this as the liner notes to *Channel Orange*. Instead of a declarative statement of identity, Ocean decided to write the note as a story of his youthful experience with love and grief for a relationship that never materialized. He describes how this relationship weaved its way through many major events in his life such as moving to Los Angeles after Hurricane Katrina devastated his home in New Orleans. This relationship continued throughout his first career in the music industry as a songwriter and then as a signed artist for Def Jam. The note takes place when Ocean was the third iteration of his music career, releasing albums under the moniker Frank Ocean. According to his description later on, Ocean was on a plane to work with Jay-Z and Kanye West on their *Watch the Throne* album when he wrote the note looking back on how the past three years culminated in that moment of success. Ocean describes how his songwriting was born in reaction to a love he did not have space to express, as a channel for "overwhelming emotions." Ocean's initial strategy for this narrative as a liner note is clear: the note would be an autobiographical narrative to welcome the audience in to understand the invention of his distinctive musical style.

Yet, Ocean's choice to release the story early is circumscribed by the conditions of the media's hunt for his sexual identity. Ocean flipped the media chase into his favor by performing with many eyes watching. Once he released his post, Ocean transformed from an underground rising star into a household name almost overnight. Of course, there was a significant amount of labor and media strategy that

went into this "overnight success." The Tumblr post was released at the same time as his debut on national television and the release of his first single for the radio. This is the double pressure of the black popstar, for not only is he playing with the fickle tastes of a mass media market, but he is also dealing with the known "gigantic sexualized repertoire" that pornotropes black flesh.[9]

The note was met with near universal praise, with even Jay Z and Beyonce coming out to explicitly praise him.[10] Much of the praise went for exaggeration, for example Telegraph declared him this generation's Prince for his songwriting and effect on popular culture.[11] Ocean's narrative was also described as endearing because it appealed to a supposedly "universal" storyline of unrequited love. Surely everyone – heterosexual or homosexual, white or black, normal or deviant – has loved someone that did not love them back the way they wished. Some reporters stressed the impact of his note on breaking a proverbial glass ceiling in Hip Hop, with some going so far as to declare him the first gay rapper even though he was neither the first nor even a rapper.[12] Yet, as noted above, Ocean's note does not make an explicit declaration of his sexuality. Ocean commented on his decision to write the story without any reference to sex in an interview:

> I'm not a centerfold. I'm not trying to sell you sex. People should pay attention to that in the letter: I didn't need to label it for it to have impact. Because people realize everything that I say is so relatable, because when you're talking about romantic love, both sides in all scenarios feel the same shit. As a writer, as a creator, I'm giving you my experiences. But just take what I give you. You ain't got to pry beyond that. *I'm giving you what I feel like you can feel.* The other shit, you can't feel. You can't feel a box. You can't feel a label. Don't get caught up in that shit. There's so much something in life. Don't get caught up in the nothing. That shit is nothing, you know? It's nothing. Vanish the fear.[13]

Ocean's expresses a critique of two things—(1) the interviewer asking him to label his sexuality and (2) the interviewer asking him to talk about the details he left out of his narrative. Here he makes a distinction between the "something in life" and the "shit [that] is nothing." This "something" is the universal concepts of love, affection, and romance. In contradistinction, the "shit [that] is nothing" is the (hyper)sexuality of the centerfold, where he fears what happens below the groin would over-determine the reception of his narrative. His comment is interesting for both refusing details while highlighting the centrality of editing for narrative construction. Ocean stresses his choice to give "you what *I feel* you can feel." He constructed his narrative shrewdly based on a calculation of many different concerns: (1) what he was comfortable sharing (2) what he thinks would be productive for others to consume and (3) details that builds the particular branding strategy he wants to carry forward. His answer reveals how important the invention of a public self can be to an entrepreneurial creator. In particular, his invention of the public self is

generated primarily through his choice to tailor his narrative to his own calculations of how the public would consume his invention.

Ocean plays with publicity, walking a tight rope between confession and secrecy. Ocean implies that there is an appetite swirling around the black queer performing body that he wants to avoid. Writing on various types of coming out narratives in the essay "On the Question of "Who's Out in Hip Hop,"" C. Riley Snorton writes that Ocean's post plays around with ambiguity more than we find in other public acts of coming out. This ambiguity tethers itself to a certain universality as a "temporally marked space of suspension where blackness might be unmoored long enough to produce a moment of possibility."[14] Snorton points us to temporality as the central concern of Ocean's post. The post focuses on youth, memory, and nostalgia in order to divert the gaze away from the "shit [that] is nothing." Ocean uses time to produce a sense of possibility in love, a possibility "where colonial, postcolonial, and continuously anti-black social conditions could somehow give way to a capacity to find the status of the black compatible with the status of human."[15] Ocean refuses the incarceration of identity by searching for something universal that escapes the box. This refusal of identity is ambiguous in that he seems to be critical of the media's gaze, but does not name the power relations and inequalities that structure the violence of media labelling. He instead appeals to the universal as a way to bridge "both sides in all scenarios." His pursuit of the universal that makes blackness and humanity compatible refuses to name or resist that which distinguish the two from each other. His description of "both sides" reduces relations of domination to interpersonal conflict that can be bridged through creative *labor*. This reduction of structure to the individual sets the stage for his branding of music as a product that can be enjoyed and bought by members of differing classes.

Beyond this critique of the self-serving nature of Ocean's nature, his strategy brings us to the curious way Ocean begins his note: "Whoever you are, wherever you are… I am starting to think we are a lot alike… Human beings spinning on blackness. All wanting to be seen, touched, heard, paid attention to." We can read his phrase "human beings spinning on blackness" as a description of human life as a universal choreography around a darkness. The nature of this blackness is ambiguous but seems to be oppositional to the universal feelings described afterwards ("wanting to be seen, touched, heard, paid attention to"). Will this so-called humanity fall into darkness if it stops moving or if it is not touched? Ocean uses universal humanism as a strategy of connection across difference, appealing to desire for recognition and feeling and a fear of blackness.

II.

Against his own wishes though, Ocean's narrative was categorized by media representation. Ocean's Tumblr note was not released into vacuum. The story occurred in the same news cycle as Anderson Cooper publicly announcing his sexuality. In

spite of this, their public performances were very different. Cooper is explicit in his identification, writing in his letter, "I'm gay, always have been, always will be." Ocean narrative stresses the contextual nature of his feelings instead of his identity. While both Ocean and Cooper released their story amidst a slew of rumors regarding their sexuality, the rumors had been following Cooper around for years prior. His place in the cultural scene was already solidified and he released his story under little structural duress. Ocean, on the other hand, was in the midst of the pop culture equivalent of a manhunt. Ocean was a rising star in the process of releasing the album that would make or break his career. It became abundantly clear that unlike Anderson Cooper, Ocean could not simply wait until he wanted to release it.

While Cooper identified himself to the public, Ocean disidentified with the way queerness is categorized in the dominant media. José Munoz describes Ocean's style of disidentification as "the management of an identity that has been 'spoiled' in the majoritarian public sphere."[16] Disidentification can be understood as a form of "citational politics," where subjects infiltrate and remake the abject gaps within performativity. These acts of queer worldmaking are necessarily fleeting, yet they are also productive of a claim to mobility foreclosed by identification with the reiterated norm. These queer worlds proliferate at the borders of, and encircle or enclose, the performative norm. Thus, we can complicate the normal reading of Ocean's aim in a few ways: (1) Ocean is not merely seeking out the universal, but is attempting to inhabit the zone of the abject produced by the normative reiteration of this norm. This disidentification is not exclusive from a certain form of identification, but is a complicated way of citing the norm with a queered performance. (2) This disidentification occurs through his rejection of labels, therefore attempting to remain free of the violent naming practices of the dominant order. Ocean's tactics can be understood through the larger frame of understanding performance as ultimately "eluding our grasp," as an affirmation of his "body in motion." Ocean's tactic is to attempt to remain free—and thus remain a "something"—in contradistinction to being fixed—transformed into a "nothing." With Snorton, we can say Ocean disidentifies in order to invent a moment of possibility for his public performance.

Muñoz borrows from Judith Butler's theory of performativity and her explication of the citationality of identity in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler's text analyzes "the conditions of [the subject's] emergence and operation" and "the matrix through which all willing becomes possible."[17] If the body only materializes through the reiteration and citation of the dominant norms, then this also implies that there are identities—possible becomings of the body—that are performatively *excluded*. This is to say that for Butler's formulation, the construction of the body is only possible in "a differential operation that produces the more and less human, the inhuman, the human unthinkable."[18] These excluded positions of uninhabitability are, of course, inhabited by millions of abjected

bodies. And this—these gaps in, as well as provided by, performativity—provide the room for a resistance to produce a radical breakdown in social constructions. The consolidation and sedimentation of these norms produces the possibility of a productive crisis that the subject can take advantage of through what Butler calls "citational politics."[19] Butler's example is the re-appropriation of the term "queer" from the language of sexual pathology into a term of defiance and legitimacy. This radical form of "willing" operates within the matrix of performativity by performing a citation with a critical *difference*: the affirmation of the abject that is excluded from the norm. This makes it possible to produce a world "in which queer lives become legible, valuable, and worthy of support."[20] This is the critical differentiation of performativity and performance. While performativity is the condition of possibility for the subject, performance is a particular form of theatricality that, in its citationality, sits in the zone of uninhabitability, the gap of the abject.

Thinking along with Butler and Munoz, we may ask: Can we extend these forms of "citational politics" to the peculiar institutions of antiblackness? Is the slave abject? Is the "position of the unthought," to use Hartman's phrase, the same as the "zone of uninhabitability"? Butler is pessimistic on the extension of citationality to antiblackness, citing the ongoing re-appropriation of the term "nigger" as the foil to the successful re-appropriation of queer: "When and how does a term like "queer" become subject to an affirmative *re*signification for some when a term like "nigger," despite some recent efforts at reclamation, appears capable of only reinscribing its pain?"[21] Saidiya Hartman describes a force conjuring a "primacy, quiddity, or materiality that exceeds the frame of" performance in the very act of *uttering* "black" or theorizing blackness through performance. Hartman stresses that this force is not metaphysical but is the product of the history of anti-black racial terror.[22] The repeated spectacle of racial terror over centuries produced a material toxicity to blackness that makes it difficult to performatively untether itself from. Aside from this materiality is the fact that disavowal is a part of the grammar of *anti*-blackness. So, performances that attempt to escape from the hold of blackness end up repeating the very disavowal demanded by antiblackness. This is why Butler notices the appearance of a reinscription of pain in the attempt to disidentify with nigger—the disidentification with nigger is the violence that produced the nigger in the first place. Hartman and Butler raise serious concerns about the power of performativity for Ocean attempt to disidentify with media categorization.

In spite of the problems, Ocean found a type of success in his humanistic appeal. Yet, just as our analysis above showed that "citational politics" only intensifies the anti-black violence, so too went this strategy of disidentification. First, Ocean's affirmation of the universal grammar of love and acceptance did not force the dominant order to reflect on its own heteronormativity. Instead, Ocean's performance became an opportunity for catharsis and self-congratulation on the so-called progress of breaking a glass ceiling. Nicole Fleetwood describes the important role that racial icons play in mediating the divide between the espoused

values of American democracy and the clear shortcomings in its inequality: "The camera loves the black subject whose struggles for equality represent the possibilities of American democracy. Twentieth-century American visual archives abound with iconic images of larger-than-life and fixed black subjects in duress and achieving remarkable feats."[23] Ocean's story was declared a triumph on arrival, a proof of the progress of the nation to accept a figure such as him. Thus, the racial icon is used to both admit to the oppression of the past, but also the image of the icon consigns this oppression to the past. "Iconic images are emotional because they are born in conflict or confusion. Thus, we turn to the last and crucial function of the iconic image, which is that it encompasses a basic contradiction or recurrent crisis within the society, a deep problem that will already be coded into the picture."[24] The icon represents a progressive future and a redemptive present. This is only possible due to Ocean's own repression of matters below the groin, a censorship that allows a nominal acceptance without controversy.

Second, this moment of national catharsis quickly produces the "black community" as a phantasmic foil. If the dominant order is allowed to be temporized by progress—it is allowed to grow, mature, and change—the black community (in its many guises, "the hip hop community," "African-Americans," "the Black church," etc.) is frozen as a backwards culture or the last remaining space where homophobia is the paradigm. This claim is reiterated constantly in the discourse surrounding Ocean "coming out," constantly commending him for being brave especially because he is black or is a singer in the "hip hop community." *The Independent* reported that Frank Ocean's post was a "sea change" moment for Hip Hop, which they described as a "less tolerant community."[25] In the coverage of Ocean's story, this description was relatively normal, with the Black community being cast as especially homophobic in comparison to the increasingly progressive nation. Even the collective that gave Ocean's career new life, Odd Future, was used as an example of how uniquely homophobic Hip Hop culture is (in spite of the fact OFWGKTA might be the first popular Hip Hop collective to have multiple artists who are openly queer).[26] The phantasm of the Black/Hip Hop community is used as a ground floor to distinguish the progress of the nation through the iconic figure of Frank Ocean. Far from bridging "both sides in all scenarios," Ocean's ambiguous disidentification became a useful object for the construction of the antiblack national image.

III.

In spite of his intention, Ocean's capacity for self-invention is produced through a disavowal of the pathology of black sexuality. In attempting to repress the "nothing" below the groin, his performance swerved right back into it. Outside of the curated media response, the immediate reaction on Twitter to his Tumblr post were many who compared Frank Ocean to convicted child-molester Jerry Sandusky.[27] What trolls on Twitter do is not the fault of Ocean, but it does reveal that terror of

antiblackness exists outside of his reduction of power to the individual level. Ocean's strategy of refusing representation is a resistant posture, but one with severe limitations. His performance reveals that while this affirmation of humanism resists antiblack stereotyping in favor of the complexity of Black emotion and work, it also falls into a trap of ranking feelings and bodily performance according to what can be understood and consumed in public. To describe desire and sexuality as "the shit [that] is nothing" is to denigrate it. This is the double-bind of racial iconicity that Fleetwood writes about in her text *On Racial Icons*,

> The verb to denigrate, with its Latin origins and roots in light/dark metaphors, means not only "to blacken" but also "to defame," "to discredit." To denigrate is a castigation in which darkness is associated with incivility, evil, mystery, and the subhuman… The racial icon as both a venerated and denigrated figure serves a resonating function as a visual embodiment of American history.[28]

All of this is to say, Ocean's attempt to disavow the pornotropic force of (his own) black flesh was not merely a failure, but an intensification of such violence. Ocean's attempt to affirm his fluidity only spun him in a circle around the fixed, absent center of an always-already queered blackness.[29] In this way, Ocean's performing black body became the absent center of blackness that nation could build an image of humanity around. Iconicity affords Ocean popularity and money, but this also serves the other side of the coin: the denigration of blackness.

This denigration of blackness in the contemporary public sphere is the result of the *longue durée* of antiblackness, beginning with the devastation of capture of bodies from the African coast. Spillers describes this theft and *organ-ization* of the body as a reduction of the subject to "a thing, to being for the captor" or flesh "seared, divided, ripped-apartness, and riveted to the ship's hole."[30] This flesh, socially naked and reduced to a set of organs without a body, was an object to be transported wherever the transatlantic slave trade wished to shuttle them to. Spillers theorizes the flesh in distinction to the body. Hartman makes a slight departure in her analysis in a note in *Scenes of Subjection*: "Although I do not distinguish between the body and the flesh as liberated and captive subject positions, I contend that the negation of the subject that results from such restricted recognition reinscribes the condition of social death."[31] For Hartman, the slave is a body/flesh dynamic—person and property under the law—to be sliced apart, used, abused, and discarded according to the whims of the master and nation.

Hartman shows us across disparate, interlocking sites such as the coffle, the auction block, the slave quarters, and even the supposed areas of slave performance "outside" of the gaze of the master, that the performance of contentment and enjoyment were a fundamental aspect of this body/flesh dynamic. On the auction block, the value of slaves could fluctuate depending on their performance, so there was economic incentive in compelling slave contentment. This cannot discount the

economy of pleasure generated from the compulsion of slave performance. Outside of the work gained from a slave, the normalization of violence was used to weaponize the agency of the body against the slave to compel performances of contentment. In her groundbreaking text, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry clarifies the weaponization of the body as making it "emphatically and crushingly present by destroying it. It is in part this combination that makes torture, like any experience of great physical pain, mimetic of death."[32] This mimesis between pain and death is ontologized under the conditions of racial slavery where "the discursive constitution of blackness is the inescapable prison house of the flesh or the indelible drop of blood—that is, the purportedly intractable and obdurate materiality of physiological difference."[33] Perhaps this prison house can also be called a slaughterhouse, where racial slavery repeats the violence of its genesis, "a theft of the body—a willful and violent… severing of the captive body from its motive will."[34] In this schema, anti-blackness is a system of gratuitous severing and cutting black flesh from "its active desire" echoing throughout the longue duree of the modern world. In an introduction to a special issue of Black American Literature Forum, written with Farah Jasmine Griffin, they describe this process of severing as organ-ization, "The 'truth' of the body becomes evidence used against us. Fragmented, de-formed, and organ-ized—breasts, dicks, backs, hands, buttocks, and pussies are in circulation. The organ-ization of the body yields profits."[35]

Spillers' concept of the flesh as cultural vestibularity conceptually precedes the Butlerian concept of the body and performativity. And it is in the vestibule—what Hartman calls "the inescapable prisonhouse of the flesh"—where the black remains. Black existence slides back-and-forth between "sheer physical powerlessness" and a "general powerlessness."[36] This poses a conundrum of theorizing black performance, for the terror of powerlessness always haunts any attempt to assert a legitimate claim for the black to propriety and property (most notably the black's own flesh).[37] Even if unconsciously, black people have a memory or an understanding of the reductive violence that meets the flesh. Ocean's reason for repressing the fleshly aspects of his story reveal a desire to refuse how the commodifying gaze reduces black people to the raw vulnerability of the flesh. His weapon of choice against this commodifying gaze was the universality of a romantic melodrama. In order to resist hypersexuality Ocean forces the narrative in the opposite direction. Yet, the ambiguity of Ocean's narrative is its greatest strength, opening up very different ways to read its many parts. We return back to Ocean's poetic section of the Tumblr post which reads, "Whoever you are, Wherever you are… I'm starting to think we're a lot alike. Human beings spinning on blackness. All wanting to be seen, touched, heard, paid attention to."[38] The narrative simultaneously addresses, in a stunning intimacy, its audience and its own status as performance. Yet it is this imagery, of human beings spinning on blackness that is the most arresting and interesting. These are touchstones of the human—the desire to be seen, touched, heard, and understood. These touchstones may be what we could call a general

schema of the motor (ie the force that moves) that drives the narrative or dramatic strategy of humanism. Yet, like a possible energizing source for a motor, these tenets, and the bodies they move through, achieve their dynamism through a spinning around a fixed, absent center of blackness. Round and round it spins, revving up faster and faster, evading our grasp, contingent, fluid, and electrifying.

One could say that this fixed center is actually the norm while the abject—the black, the queer, etc.—is the dynamism that spins around it, eluding its grasp. Yet, as displayed by Ocean's projected relation to a phastasmic "black community," all the pathologies of the dominant community are projected into the absent center of blackness. In this trajectory of spinning, the subject can discharge all toxic elements through these reiterated acts of disavowal. This absent center is Hartman's "prisonhouse of the flesh." That black bodies move is undoubtedly true, but the movements' relation to the world is the crisis. In order for the black to gain the illusion of freedom and self-invention, a triple motion occurs: (1) the fixed-ness of blackness must be disavowed, as shown by Ocean's repression of the *nothingness of his raw sexuality*. (2) Such freedom becomes a monstrosity, an instance of frozen pathology and deviance, as displayed by the immediate comparison of Ocean to a child molester (3) Ocean's disavowal freezes him as an object of the humanity he is seeking, to be used for the progress of the nation he sells his narrative to. All of this then may give us a better sense for why Ocean ends his narrative with this, "I feel like a free man. If I listen closely.. I can hear the sky falling too."

Extending our epigraph from Hartman, Nicole Fleetwood defines blackness as that which "fills in space between matter, between object and subject, between bodies, between looking and being looked upon. [Blackness] fills in the void and is the void."[39] A void is not necessarily absence, but is a space of emptiness, a space that just *is*. Instead of the comforts of an identity, a being of emptiness is not a lack, but the full terror of possibility, a space where anything is possible. Without a schema, a path, or a way, black life is lived in the terror of possibility and impossibility. Dionne Brand gives us a different way to think about this in her collection "Land to Light On." The poem begins, "light passes through me lightless, sound soundless," which reads much like a black hole.[40] One can never see a black hole, but only see how it distorts the constellations around it. Light cannot escape its gravity. This a sense of place that normative geography cannot describe—an anti-*geo* that cannot be *graphed.* In the poem, Brand affirms this ungeographicness: "I don't want no fucking country here/ or there and all the way back, I don't like it, none of it."[41] This is not only a refusal of varying settler nations of the globe, but a refusal to take part in the national project in general. Brand lights on a refusal of any form of nationalism for a sense of place that exists outside of this conception. This is a political call of the void and from the void against any politics of integration or human community born from its dispossession: "I'm giving up on land to light on, and why not/ I can't perfect my own shadow."[42] Brand's poetics shine a light on a question for Ocean's performative strategy: what could Ocean have

achieved in his narrative if instead of calculating how the nation would consume his narrative, he instead focused on perfecting his own sense of darkness, his own shadow? What could Ocean have created if instead of seeing himself as humanity spinning around, he instead chose to perfect the Blackness in the center? Brand perfects a black poetics that does not seek integration and recognition into a global community. This is a black sense of place out its mind, just in time.[43] Instead of Ocean's politics of performative self-invention, Brand allows us to re-read his phrase "Humanity spinning on blackness" as a call for Humanity to fall into blackness, to perfect the shadow of "the shit [that] is nothing." Instead of the eternal motor of humanism, what would our politics and dreams look like if we affirmed the stillness of an absent center, a void, a shadow?

So we have spun back to where we began, where we are stuck, and where we may call home, if we so orient our thoughts towards this impossible object of black performance. An object made impossible not because it evades our grasp, but because it is the nothing we know too well, but can perfect. We cannot bear that what is grasped in our hands is nothing other than our hands, *in the flesh*. What if we took the advice of Baby Suggs in *Beloved* and choose, in spite of the world, to love our hands, to love this fixed and immobile flesh? What if our schema for understanding performance was neither mobility nor movement, but captivity?

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Freedom by Design: The House that Slavery Built

Egbert Alejandro Martina

In his address to the Bundestag in Berlin in May 2002, President George W. Bush emphasized the need for a unified Europe, noting:

> Different as we are, we are building and defending the same house of freedom—its doors open to all of Europe's people, its windows looking out to global challenges beyond. We must lay the foundation with a Europe that is whole and free and at peace for the first time in its history. This dream of the centuries is close at hand.[1]

Bush remarked that the bond between the US and the European Union transcends military cooperation, and economic exchange, arguing that "we are heirs to the same civilization." The integration of European markets, and a shared currency formed "the conditions for security and common purpose." The fates of Europe and the US, the president argued, are interconnected: "when Europe grows in unity, Europe and America grow in security." Bush also turned his attention to Russia, believing that "Russia has its best chance since 1917 to become a part of Europe's family."

In 1989, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had already outlined in an address to the Council of Europe a programmatic concept of "a common European home,"[2] arguing that "if security is the foundation of a common European home, then all-round co-operation is its bearing frame." Both Bush and Gorbachev establish an inextricable connection between security, freedom, capital, homeliness, and, implicitly, whiteness. This is, as Gilbert Caluya would argue, an "intimate security"[3] that is founded upon White domesticity. Naming Europe as a family or a common home invokes a communality that transcends nationality and territorial boundaries, both of which underlie the common understanding of 'homeland'. Here, whiteness takes on the meaning of homeland, acting as as "a form of positive residence."[4] Operating under the sign of security and freedom, whiteness is the unifying identifier that "'extends' the family form," connecting all of these disparate nations despite their ideological and national differences.

The political metaphor of Europe as a house, a bounded area in which Europeans live together as a family, sheltered and protected from external threats, has been one of the key metaphors in the discourses concerning European integration and security.[5] The idea of the house as a protective sphere is perhaps best captured

in the pithy axiom "a man's home is his castle." This phrase conveys an image of *home* as both an enclosed circle of intimacy, and a fortified structure that provides its inhabitants both protection from the elements and ontological security, "a feeling of safety, predictability and security in life which provides the baseline for an improvement in mental health and well-being."[6] The enduring power of this axiom reflects the importance of the *domus* in shaping conceptions of safety, security, and authority: the domestic is the primary means of achieving and securing the basic values of freedom or autonomy. To quote Walt Whitman, "a man is not a whole and complete man, unless he *owns* a house and the ground it stands on."[7] In other words, a house is always more than just shelter. Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva note that,

> A house is a juridical-economic-moral entity that, as property, has material (as asset), political (as dominium), and symbolic (as shelter) value. Houses, as such, refer to the three main axes of modern thought: the economic, the juridical, and the ethical, which are, as one would expect, the registers of the modern subject.[8]

Historically, the house has played a pivotal role in the ideological (re)production of 'proper' citizens. The *domus* is a site of surveillance that mediates the porous boundary between the private sphere of familial intimacy and reproduction, and the public realm of capital. The metaphor of the Europe Union as a house thus bespeaks an architectural imaginary that informs an idea of politics as a patriarchal, heteronormative, and racialised control of space. Moreover, the metaphor of "house of freedom" suggests that freedom is not a set of rights and obligations, but a securitized spatial construct that is of central importance for the ordering and governing of the European Union. What the metaphor conveys is the strong belief that security and freedom are not only interrelated, but isomorphic concepts.

The ongoing "migrant crisis," which is perceived as a security risk and, as such, a threat to the "house of freedom," has put a strain on the EU's area of freedom, security, and justice (AFSJ) policies.[11] In 2019, the European Parliament remarked in a resolution on search and rescue in the Mediterranean that "Europe should not be seen as catchall for economic opportunists from Africa or prospectors from other regions around the world."[12] The fantasy of Africa as a void, populated by voracious opportunists in pursuit of fortune, is constitutive to the production of Europe's security regime. In this context, the newly instituted commission "to protect the European way of life"[13] should be understood as an intensification of a racialized regime of "securitized freedom."[14] To regard Europe as being under threat from Africans is a stunning reversal of historical facts. European politicians have a long history of obfuscating the violence and "little human sustenance"[15] to which "the European way of life" owes its coherence. The ontological security that the "house of freedom" provides for its white inhabitants has been made possible through genocide, displacement, dispossession, and slavery, which make up the very foundation and supporting frame of the house itself. The 'migrant crisis' is not

an aberrant tragedy, but the direct outcome of the violent practices that are necessary to maintain the structural integrity of a house held together by white fantasies of humanitarian interventions, and illusions of freedom and justice. These latest anxious attempts to "protect the European way of life" have been criticised as playing into the rhetoric of far-right populists. However, they stand in a long line of efforts to secure the survival of a struggling Europe.

In this essay, I highlight two efforts in particular: the 1920s utopian architectural and geopolitical projects of "Eurafrica" and "Atlantropa"—both projects emphasised the exploitation of African resources and labor power as essential for Europe's unification, continued growth, and development. These projects offered a framework for post-1945 unification debates.[16] The "house of freedom" metaphor, as well as the Eurafrica and Atlantropa projects, raise unsettling questions about European integration, and architecture's role in the EU's geopolitics of freedom, security and expansion through its Neighborhood Policy. The metaphor organizes not only an understanding of the EU as an architectural and residential project situated in a changing neighborhood, it also organizes, at the same time, a distinctive understanding of freedom—contingent on a constitutive division between interior and exterior. As a final point, I draw out, by way of a brief reflection on Fanon's leap of invention, some architectural and political implications of Fanon's discussion of colonial architecture and urbanism, and his program of decolonization.

Eurafrica and Atlantropa

The European Union, as a supranational post-war project, was created with the objective of securing peace "by integrating the economies of their members in such a way that war and armed conflict between them is impossible as well as unthinkable."[17] From its inception, the European union has imagined itself as a space of freedom, security, and justice. However, as Wolfgang Burgdorf argues, "political unity in Europe was inexorably linked to the age-old question of imperial reform."[18] The Berlin Conference of 1884-85, which regulated the partitioning of Africa between imperial powers, was "the first true act of European co-operation in Africa."[19] The late-stage imperial projects Atlantropa and Eurafrica presented utopian, technologically audacious, plans for a unified Europe that surpassed the imperialist design programmes of the Berlin Conference both in scale and geopolitical scope.

Eurafrica was the brainchild of Austrian aristocrat Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, who believed that intra-European stability could only be achieved if European nations pursued a joint imperial objective—the exploitation of Africa. Coudenhove-Kalergi formulated Eurafrica as a practical solution to mitigate tensions between European colonial powers and foster cooperative security. "European security was," as Bruno Charbonneau notes, "tied to European cooperation in Africa, but it was an imperial understanding of cooperation that was devoid of Africans."[20] In *Europe Turns to Africa*, Coudenhove-Kalergi couched the imperial designs of Eurafrica in humanitarian terms.[21] He asserts that "healing, educating, and

improving the black race" would "compensate morally for the political conquest of Africa." In other words, it is through a civilizing mission, bringing "light to this darkest of all continents," that "Europe can repay Africa for value received." He notes further that,

> Europe must be the liberator of the black race in Africa, not the exploiter. She must free the African from poverty, barbarism, hunger, anarchy, sleeping sickness, and the other diseases from which he suffers. The women of Africa, who are today mere beasts of burden, must be freed from their condition of bitter slavery.

Coudenhove-Kalergi's 'concern' for the plight of "the black race" in general and African women in particular is, to say the least, dubious and amounts to a kind of "concern-trolling."[22] African development, his proposed solution, would only exacerbate colonial violence and further entrench patriarchal structures in line with European views of women's domestic work and roles.[23] Coudenhove-Kalergi believed that "the task of colonizing the deserted districts of Africa concerns all Europe, and indeed the entire white race, for the exploitation and colonization of Africa will lead to the extension, growth, and consolidation of Europe."[24]

European nations could reap the economic advantages only "if Europe erects for herself a solid federal system to do away with the danger of war and national rivalry."[25] Europe was to transform "Africa into a great European plantation"[26] which "would improve the whole economic condition of [Europe] and would raise the standard of living among all its peoples."[27] Yet, this coordinated "transformation of Africa into a great European plantation" would be, in effect, an isometric transformation, a transformation that remains congruent to the original figure in the white imaginary. The plantation is "the condition of black death-life in modernity."[28]

What allows Coudenhove-Kalergi to conceptualize Africa "as the ultimate sign for expansion and unending space within the symbolic economy of settlement"[29] are the "figurative capacities of blackness."[30] 'Africa' served merely as a screen for white flights of fantasy and a conduit for European self-actualization. Europe, the plantation house (of freedom), built by slave labour and maintained through violence, would grow into a monstrosity of a building, sprawling across the vast African continent.

German architect Herman Sörgel's 1920s plans for Africa were no less infused with imperial ambitions. Atlantropa proposed the construction of a massive dam at the Straits of Gibraltar and the Dardanelles to serve as a power plant. This new source of unlimited hydroelectric power would ensure European economic security, energy independence,[31] and peace in Europe. According to Sörgel, "the interlacing of Europe through high-voltage wires is a better guarantee of freedom than treaties on paper since the destruction of the wires would imply the self-destruction of each people."[32] Atlantropa would require a complete redesign of the Mediterranean Basin that would drastically change the political landscape of

Europe. Sörgel's geographic, geopolitical, and architectural mission was nothing less than to bring about a 'new' world order by exploiting Africa through European technological prowess and turn the "empty continent devoid of history and culture"[33] into a "territory actually useful to Europe." His plan encompassed "the environmental and climatic transformation of the entire African continent."[34] In Sörgel's architectural vision, only the unification of Europe could provide "a final and lasting victory over chaotic international tendencies" and secure "the might that is unconditionally necessary to create the sufficient *Lebensraum* for the demographic and production power of the white race."[35]

In the end, both Coudenhove-Kalergi and Sörgel 'failed' to realize their designs. What is central here, however, is not the question of whether they managed to realize their white supremacist fantasies. Rather, their designs tell us a lot about how Europe's intellectual elite imagined the European peace and freedom project as only achievable *through* a (re)development of Africa—a process that would make the continent suitable for European modes of living. It required redesigning both the architectural and climatic conditions of the African continent to accommodate European comfort. We can find the same violent consumptive desires in the declaration of Robert Schuman, one of the EU's founding fathers: "With increased resources, Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent. In this way, there will be realised simply and speedily that fusion of interest which is indispensable to the establishment of a common economic system; it may be the leaven from which may grow a wider and deeper community between countries long opposed to one another by sanguinary divisions."[37] Schuman, much like his predecessors, considered the development of Africa not as a necessity for the good of African peoples, but rather an essential tactical move to assuage and even resolve long-standing intra-European conflicts of German and French economic and national interests. African development, with all its attendant planning policies and institutions, would form a pathway through which European market integration could be accessed and realized. Africa, as a space of unending potential, opens up and fuels the very structural possibility for the (infinite) expansion of a unified and stable Europe. In other words, Africa signals not a discrete territorial entity with a spatial integrity of its own but stands for "the ways the natural world could be imagined as manipulable and an open landscape of flux."[38]

The coordinated development and exploitation Africa, an undifferentiated space subject to all manners of use, would not only allow for efficient resource extraction and capital accumulation, but more importantly, it would provide the key conditions of possibility for the consolidation of European geopolitical and economic power. Tiffany Lethabo King, in her theoretical elaboration on Black fungibility as a spatial analytic, offers a way to conceptualize this imperial process of space-making. In *The Black Shoals*, King explains that Blackness "enabled the human to self-actualize as an expression of unfettered spatial expansion and human

potential."[39] *Africa*, as the paradigmatic articulation of black fungibility, is both "a form of raw material and an expression of spatial expansion" as well as "an abstract, always moving process that enables human geographical projects."[40] As such, Black fungibility not only makes the production and expansion of space possible, but it is also fundamental to the transformation of space into a *unified whole*.

Architecture has proven a necessary adjunct in maintaining the EU's anti-black structure and securing its geopolitical aims.[41] Herman Sörgel was one of the first architects, but certainly not the only one, to understand architectural design's geopolitical potential. Most recently, in 2010 the research branch of Rem Koolhaas' Office for Metropolitan Architecture, known as AMO, and management consultancy McKinsey & Company[42] submitted a report to the European Climate Foundation called "Eneropa"[43] that matches Sörgel's Atlantropa in its geopolitic and strategic ambitions. The report proposed a large-scale redesign of Europe's energy infrastructure that also included North Africa (the Spain-Morocco submarine cable connects Europe's electricity grid to North Africa). AMO's proposal restructures the entire continent, redrawing national borders, and creating regions based on the method of renewable energy generation that will supply the larger Eneropa grid.[44] In the vein of its spiritual predecessor Atlantropa, Eneropa envisions a completely energy-independent and low-carbon European continent.[45]

Liberalism, Architecture, and Freedom

Historically, architects have used architecture and urban planning as material vehicles of propaganda and violence to facilitate social control and consolidate colonial power.[46] Architecture is not only a powerful instrument for remaking spaces, but also for forging and supplementing political agendas. French colonial architect Joseph Marrast, for example, incorporated features of Moroccan indigenous/Islamic architecture in his design of Casablanca's courthouse so as to "help quell the hostility of Moroccans toward European domination."[47] Marrast wielded architecture as a weapon to enforce conformity, noting "little by little we conquer the hearts of the natives and win their affection, as is our duty as colonizers."[48] Here, architectural drawings (such as plans, elevations, and sections) and other architectural objects (such as buildings, and infrastructure), rather than being *merely* expressions of a specific architectural style, function as techniques for the projection and translation of spatio-legal and racial enclosures. Put differently, architecture is not only, or I would argue even primarily, an aesthetic art, but an apparatus for the production of subjectivities appropriate to its design and function. Architecture creates, constrains, and regulates the spatial conditions in which we might experience "freedom." Its primary function is to establish lines of demarcation *and* lines of conduct that precede any architectural object.

In this regard, architecture as a design discipline is concomitant with and extends liberalism's regime of demarcation, or as political theorist Michael Walzer crisply put it, liberalism's "art of separation."[49] Liberalism, like architecture, draws

lines separating institutional spheres, and "the most famous line" liberalism draws is "the 'wall' between church and state."[50] Both liberalism and architecture are equally bounded by what Achille Mbembe calls a racial logic of enclosure, "a more or less coded way of dividing and organizing a multiplicity, of fixing and distributing it according to a hierarchy, of allocating it to more or less impermeable spaces."[51] Liberalism, as Walzer argues, creates "a world of walls, and each one creates a new liberty."[52] Liberal freedom, then, is produced as an effect of walling, and can, paradoxically, only be experienced within "a world of walls," whether the *oikos* (the house) or the *polis* (the city). Yet, at the same time, the wall, as an architectural element, embodies coercion and regulate mobility. How one experiences the effects of walling depends on how one is situated in relation to the wall.

The architectural wall, whether conceptual or physical, is a "scriptive thing"; it creates a set of instructions for organized space that encourages or discourages certain behaviours.[53] Robin Bernstein notes that "scriptive things archive the repertoire—partially and richly, with a sense of openness and flux."[54] Liberal freedom thus rides on the tension between, on the one hand, "enclosure," a space of coercion and surveillance, and on the other, a space of limitless self-creation (within a neoliberal free market system), in which the "self" can be (re)invented. Enclosure thus provides, counter-intuitively, a space for both coercion and "openness and flux." Freedom, to put it plainly, can only be experienced within restrictions, whether material or legal. In this sense, it is not so much enclosure as a spatial manifestation—that is, a quality of architecture—that I am interested in, but enclosure as a structure that precedes and supersedes its spatial appearance *altogether*.

We might consider the family as one such enclosure. Bush's reference to Europe as a family was certainly not original. The idea that Europeans were united through their 'common ancestry' has long and deep roots. François Lenormant and Elisabeth Chevallier write the following about Europeans:

> The race of Japhet is then that which is also designated, to indicate the extent of its domain, the *Indo-European race*. To this race we ourselves belong. It is a race noble beyond all others, the race to which Providence has assigned the mission of carrying a degree of perfection, unknown to other races, arts, sciences, philosophy.[55]

What underpins the notion of a "Europe as a family of nations," then, and what whiteness invests itself in, is "a particular version of race *and* a particular version of family, predicated on 'likeness', where likeness becomes a matter of 'shared attributes'."[56] Yet, as president Bush underlines in his address, white sociality is homogeneous and heterogeneous at the same time, both indivisible and divisible in parts**.** The "house of freedom," which is built from these intimate kinship structures, represents an enclosed sociality of whiteness, that is invested in *being threatened*, and *being threatening*. After all, the house of freedom is both a *home* and a *fortress*. The violence of threat (the home as fortress) and being threatened (the home as permeable, open to invasion) are intricately entwined in this architectural metaphor.

A familial intimacy of sorts is implicit, at least in Germanic languages, in the etymology of the word "free," whose Indo-European root *priyos[57] indicates "one's own, the personal, but with a connotation of affection or closeness rather than of legal property."[58] It was used to refer to "personal possessions, of parts of one's body, but also of people with whom one had an emotional connection," and could also be translated as "dear, beloved." The latter meaning *dear, beloved* is still preserved in the Dutch verb *vrijen*, which could be translated as either *to woo* or *to have intercourse with* (it translates literally as "to free"). Liberty comes to us from the Latin word for *free*, liber, whose etymological root is *(e)leudheros. Émile Benviste notes that the free man in Greek and Latin is "positively defined by his membership of a "breed," of a "stock.""[59] He further notes that "to be born of good stock is to be free; it comes to the same thing." In Germanic languages the connection between "free" and "friend" allows us "to reconstitute a primitive notion of liberty as belonging to a closed group of those who call one another "friends."" The individual "owes not only his free status but also "his own self"" to the group to which he belongs. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin tells us that "the oldest sense of all these words [seems] to be a status classification, the contrast between slave and non-slave, which, in turn, depends on a notion of group membership."[60] Freedom, then, emerges as a way to assess belonging *in* and *to* the world. It connotes a sense of a close identification; of one's relation to friends and those who can be enslaved. Freedom, in a sense, is about how 'those who belong' experience attachment through different kinds of institutional affiliations and abstractions like race, gender, class, nation. The slave is the 'negative' space that defines freedom. The legal enclosure of the slave, to riff off Saidiya Hartman,[61] makes the enclosures of the (social) body, and kinship possible.

Conclusion: Decolonization as Invention

The spatial metaphor of the 'house'—as a symbol for freedom—reveals how the domestic blurs the line between the home and the world. The house of freedom, a formal order where the private and public domains converge, is the outcome of embedded architectural and geopolitical practices that create lines and surfaces that both enclose and produce space without creating impermeable barriers between an interior and an exterior.[62] Yet, what does it mean to conceive of freedom as being contained in specific spaces, or as the effect of space-making practices? Or, to put it succinctly: can architecture produce freedom?

Fanon's analysis of architecture and city spaces offers some important insights into the connections between freedom, architectural form, subjective space, and racialization. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon probes the colonial practices of control and domination through juridical and architectural means, i.e. military operations, and housing units: colonialism is an architectural project, "built to last, all stone and steel."[63] Using a bodily metaphor, Fanon describes colonial urban space as a pervasive gluttonous and engorged spatial system. "The colonist's sector

is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things. The colonist's sector is a white folks' sector, a sector of foreigners."[64] Conversely, the colonized's space is "a world with no space, people are piled one on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together." It is "a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light"—"a sector that crouches and cowers, a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate."[65] Architecture and urban planning are both implicated in the production of a contingent and disjunctive "humanity." Fanon's description of colonial spatiality captures how the ossified structure of colonial domination creates not only "a hierarchical architecture of containment designed to rearrange and stack up categories of colonial subjects,"[66] but also a sensory politics—what Adrienne Brown might call a "racial sensorium"[67] of colonial urbanism. Fanon offers a clear description of how racial violence is spatialized and materially inhabited. There is an essential and irreconcilable antagonism between the "native" sector and the European sector. "The two," Fanon argues, "confront each other, but not in the service of a higher unity. Governed by a purely Aristotelian logic, they follow the dictates of mutual exclusion: There is no conciliation possible, one of them is superfluous."[68]

A study of the lines of force that separate the spacious neighborhood from the slum, Fanon tells us, will enable us "to delineate the backbone on which the decolonized society is reorganized."[69] And he proposes a program of decolonization that targets the totality of spatial organization. For Fanon, decolonization—the destruction of the colonial world—is "nothing less than demolishing the colonist's sector, burying it deep within the earth or banishing it from the territory."[70] Such a point might seem hyperbolic, but Fanon is careful to disabuse us of the notion that architecture and urban planning are innocent: architecture itself is "violence ritualized."[71] And through its practices, protocols, and forms, architecture monumentalizes colonial violence in a very material, physical sense. Colonial urbanism, Fanon emphatically argues, cannot be rehabilitated. Decolonization demands the complete razing of the structures that support the colonial world and regulate the 'native' sector.

For Fanon, decolonization is a logic of destruction *and* invention: the emergence of a new world involves the ruin of an old system.[72] Yet, it is important to note that the destruction of the colonist's sector is not simply the removal of its architecture from 'public' space, but rather the complete rejection of its imposed architectural spatial order—its spatial divisions, its lines, its surfaces, and ultimately its meaning and purpose. The destruction of the colonial world makes space for alternate modes of inhabitation. Thus, destruction and invention are not opposing terms, but together constitute a refusal to repeat, or even tolerate, the colonial spatial order. With this in mind, perhaps, we might (re)think the popular language of the riot as a way to spatially articulate *liberation* from an architectural order understood as anti-black.

As a final point, I want to turn to a different context in which Fanon examines anti-black racism through spatial processes and architectural metaphors. In

Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon draws explicitly on architectural tropes to delineate the form of the book, and the effects of anti-black racism. Fanon describes the text's "architecture" as one framed by "temporality," because "every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time."[73] The future, a new epoch, too takes on an architectural form. He writes that, "the future should be an edifice supported by living men." In his words, this edifice is "connected to the present to the extent that I consider the present in terms of something to be exceeded." Fanon also uses architectural imagery to signify "civil society's gratuitous violence against the Black body."[74] The racial epidermal schema is a confined space; Fanon is "sealed into crushing objecthood."[75] He writes, "I was walled in."[76] An image that Dr. Martin Luther King jr. also employs in his essay *Negroes Are Not Moving Too Fast*: "the Negro is still the poorest American walled in by color and poverty."[77] The "fact of blackness" or "the lived experience of the black" is an architectural reality—an effect of liberal humanism.

What Fanon refers to as "the real leap," which introduces "invention into existence" is, I argue, a heretical leap that requires an upending of the architectural order upon which colonial power and, in a sense, freedom depend. Fanon's leap is a form of destruction through transition that brings about a new state of existence—something new emerges in the wake of the leap that had not been there before. This leap is a creative act that reinvents the spaces we exist in. Fanonian invention is a "leap" to break the lines of enclosure (or rather, *freedom as enclosure*), and undo the planned world-order of ossified anti-black structures.

Endnotes

1. George W. Bush, "Remarks to a Special Session of the German Bundestag May 23, 2002" in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, George W. Bush (United States Government Printing, 2004), p. 855. President George W. Bush in the course of his speech invoked the same imagery his father used several years prior. In 1989, President George H. W. Bush argued that "there cannot be a common European home until all within it are free to move from room to room. And I'll take another message: The path of freedom leads to a larger home, a home where West meets East, a democratic home." Bush lamented that Americans and Europeans had forgotten their "common heritage and how the world we know came to be." Americans and Europeans were heirs to "gifts greater than those bestowed to any generation in history: peace, freedom, and prosperity." President George H. W. Bush argued that collective pan-European security "comes not from tanks, troops, or barbed wire; it is built on shared values and agreements that link free peoples." See: George H. W. Bush, "Remarks to the Citizens in Mainz, Federal Republic of Germany," May 31, 1989, accessed September 18, 2020, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/476
2. Mikhail Gorbachev, "Address given by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Council of Europe (6 July 1989)." CVCE.EU by UNI.LU, Last updated, July 3, 2015, https://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_mikhail_gorbachev_to_the_council_of_europe_6_july_1989-en-4c021687-98f9-4727-9e8b-836e0bc1f6fb.html.
3. Gilbert Caluya, "Domestic Belongings: Intimate Security and the Racial Politics of Scale," Emotion, Space and Society 4, no. 4 (2011): pp. 203-210, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2010.11.001.
4. Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007), 154.
5. The rhetoric of "House of Freedom" and other cognate rhetorical devices like "area of freedom, security and justice" naturalize Europe/the European Union as *simply* geographic entities, or geopolitical fields, rather than a regime of humanitarian imperialism that operates through spatial development.

6. European Commission, Housing First (Providing Permanent Housing) https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dyna/bp-portal/getfile.cfm?fileid=75.
7. Walt Whitman, "Wicked Architecture," New York Dissected (Journalism) - The Walt Whitman Archive, accessed September 18, 2020, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/journalism/tei/per.00270.html.
8. Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira Da Silva, "Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—An Introduction," American Quarterly 64, no. 3 (2012): pp. 361-385, https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2012.0033, p. 362
9. James Bennett Osborne, "Problem Families and the Welfare State in Post-War British Literature (1945-75)," PhD diss, University of Southampton, 2014.
10. See Claudia Anamaria Iov and Adrian Liviu Ivan, "Identity – (In)Security Nexus in the EU at the End of the 20th Century and the Beginning of the 21st Century," Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 149 (2014): pp. 428-432, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.08.202. As the writers note, "security has always been the purpose behind the European integration process." p. 429
11. See Hartmut Marhold, "The European 'Area of Freedom, Security and Justice' : Its Evolution and Three Fundamental Dilemmas," L'Europe En Formation 381, no. 3 (2016), https://doi.org/10.3917/eufor.381.0009, p. 9
12. European Parliament, "MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on Search and Rescue in the Mediterranean," europarl.europa.eu, 2019, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2019-0131_EN.html.
13. John Chalmers, "New EU Post to Protect European Way of Life Slammed as 'Grotesque'," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, September 10, 2019), https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-eu-jobs-life/new-eu-post-to-protect-european-way-of-life-slammed-as-grotesque-idUKKCN1VV26N.
14. Dace Dzenovska, "We Want to Hear from You," The Borders of "Europe," August 2017, 286.
15. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 1986, 129.
16. Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: the Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.
17. Robert S. Jordan et al., *International Organizations: a Comparative Approach to the Management of Cooperation*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2010, 132.
18. Wolfgang Burgdorf, "Imperial Reform and Visions of a European Constitution in Germany around 1800," *History of European Ideas* 19, no. 1-3 (1994), 401.
19. Bruno Charbonneau, "Dreams of Empire: France, Europe, and the New Interventionism in Africa," *Modern & Contemporary France* 16, no. 3 (2008), 286 (Chipman cited in Charbonneau)
20. Ibid.
21. Count Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, "Europe Turns to Africa," in "THE LIVING AGE," *The Unz Review*, February 1, 1930, 653. Coudenhove-Kalergi posits in his article that "public opinion throughout the civilized world should oppose, not the colonizing principle itself, but only certain of its forms." Dutch landscape architect Adriaan Geuze channels a similar sentiment in his publication for the Venice Biennale "Colonizing the Void," an urban design manifesto in which he considers colonization (or the creation of land) the ultimate expression of human culture. Geuze writes about colonialism that "in the seventies it was universally condemned as a variation on capitalist exploitation. These days a somewhat milder view prevails, even among the supposed 'victims'." Geuze further notes that "The Netherlands was a colonial power too and so has some black pages in its history, but it was also responsible for an untarnished type of colonization [...] Because of these polders in the IJsselmeer, in Dutch the term 'colonizing' has kept some of its optimistic meaning." See: Hans van. Dijk and A. Geuze, *Colonizing the Void: Adriaan Geuze, West 8 Landscape Architects*, Rotterdam (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 1996).
22. Concern trolling is "the action or practice of disingenuously expressing concern about an issue in order to undermine or derail genuine discussion." Definition of Concern Trolling by Oxford Dictionary on Lexico.com, Lexico Dictionaries | English, accessed September 18, 2020, https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/concern_trolling.
23. Maryse Condé, "Three Female Writers in Modern Africa: Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo and Grace Ogot," *Présence Africaine* 82, no. 2 (1972), 133. Condé notes that "African women stand at the very heart of the turmoil of their continent." African women, she suggests, were "the first and principal victims of the encounter with the West." Conde provides a critique of this missionary attitude found in Coudenhove-Kalergi's text, noting that "missionaries did not understand the position [African women] held in their families and societies. They quickly labelled them « beasts of burden » and decided to liberate them through education." Yet, this liberation came at a price: African women were forced to cultivate land and grow crops for Europeans.
24. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Europe*, 654.
25. Ibid., 654.
26. Ibid., 655.
27. Ibid., 655.

28. Calvin Warren, "Black Interiority, Freedom, and the Impossibility of Living," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 38, no. 2 (2016), 108.Warren argues that "*The world is a plantation for blacks*. Whether "free" or captive, blacks are subjected to the technologies of pulverization, the forced choice between physical, mental, and social death, and the permanent exclusion from human-beingness in whatever space they inhabit."
29. Tiffany King, "Labor's Aphasia: Toward Antiblackness as Constitutive to Settler Colonialism," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, June 19, 2014, https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2014/06/10/labors-aphasia-toward-antiblackness-as-constitutive-to-settler-colonialism/.
30. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 22.
31. Elsewhere I argue that colonialism and New World slavery may be understood as systems by which Europeans violently extracted energy from sources external to them—both human and more-than-human. Slavers—as a result of the Spanish empire's ravenous consumption of slaves—referred to black Africans as "oro negro," black gold—long before oil received that moniker. Africa's "black gold" of today is no longer slaves, but oil. And, the phases in the development of oil—exploration, appraisal and production—eerily recall the processes necessary to unmake and conceive of black Africans as a fungible unit. The enslaved were essentially considered a renewable energy source, that could be "naturally" replenished on a human time-scale.
32. Sörgel cited in Sven Opitz and Ute Tellmann, "Europe as Infrastructure: Networking the Operative Community," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no. 1 (2015), 178.
33. Antonio Petrov, "Mediterranean Frontiers: Ontology of a Bounded Space in Crisis," in The Design of Frontier Spaces, ed. Carolyn Loeb and Andreas Luescher (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 213-231, 222.
34. Philipp Nicolas Lehmann, "Infinite Power to Change the World: Hydroelectricity and Engineered Climate Change in the Atlantropa Project," *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 1 (2016), 82. Sörgel's plan to manipulate the African climate to make it suitable for Europeans illustrates the ways in which the climate and atmosphere (both in a literal and figurative sense) are foundational to an anti-black spatial imaginary. Christina Sharpe offers an insightful discussion on this particular point when she reads the weather as anti-black, noting "the totality of our environments…the total climate…and that climate is antiblack." See: Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: on Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 104.
35. Cited in David Thomas Murphy, "'Retroactive Effects': Ratzel's Spatial Dynamics and the Expansionist Imperative in Interwar Germany," *Journal of Historical Geography* 61 (2018), 88.
36. Eurafrica and Atlantropa, which were developed in the 1920s, were likely informed by The Rising Tide of Color, published in 1920, which predicted an apocalyptic future for "the white race."
37. Robert Schuman, "The Schuman Declaration – 9 May 1950," European Union, May 7, 2020, https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en.
38. Tiffany Lethabo King, "The Labor of (Re)Reading Plantation Landscapes Fungible(Ly)," *Antipode* 48, no. 4 (2016), 1023. I am thinking with and alongside Tiffany King, whose theory of fungibility, which is indebted to the work of Saidiya Hartman, has proven invaluable. Blackness and space, in my understanding, are isomorphic in that space itself, whether built (architectural) or abstract ((geometrical), is fungible; irrespective of its original or intended function, space can be put to many synchronous and asynchronous uses. As a discipline, architecture traffics in the creation of form and space. Yet, despite the fundamental relationship between Blackness and space, Black fungibility remains largely unthought in architectural theory.
39. Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019, 24.
40. Ibid., 121.
41. Here, I am referring specifically to architecture's role in translating abstract concepts such as "justice," and "democracy" into logical, monumental designs. Architects have designed the vast network of buildings and institutional infrastructures, e.g. the International Criminal Court, the Seat of the European Parliament, but also detention centers, prisons, immigration offices, and police stations, that materially reinforce and architecturally embody the rule of law.
42. Ian Macdougall, "How McKinsey Helped the Trump Administration Carry Out Its Immigration Policies," The New York Times (The New York Times, December 3, 2019), https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/03/us/mckinsey-ICE-immigration.html. McKinsey aided the Trump administration carry out its immigration policies, by helping ICE find "detention savings opportunities." On McKinsey's impact on European policy see Christopher D. Mckenna, "'THE AMERICAN CHALLENGE:" McKINSEY & COMPANY'S ROLE IN THE TRANSFER OF DECENTRALIZATION TO EUROPE, 1957-1975.," Academy of Management Proceedings 1997, no. 1 (1997): pp. 226-230, https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.1997.4981932.

43. Rowan Moore, "Roadmap 2050 by Rem Koolhaas's OMA | Architecture Review," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, May 8, 2010), https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/may/09/roadmap-2050-eneropa-rem-koolhaas.
44. Petrov, *Mediterranean Frontiers*, 223
45. David Basulto, "Roadmap 2050: A Practical Guide to a Prosperous, Low-Carbon Europe.," ArchDaily (ArchDaily, April 13, 2010), https://www.archdaily.com/56229/roadmap-2050-a-practical-guide-to-a-prosperous-low-carbon-europe.
46. See e.g., Fabiola López-Durán, *Eugenics in the Garden: Transatlantic Architecture and the Crafting of Modernity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019.
47. Ambe J. Njoh, Planning Power Town Planning and Social Control in Colonial Africa (London: UCL Press, 2015), p. 31
48. Marrast cited in Njoh, *Planning Power*, 31.
49. Michael Walzer, "I. Liberalism and the Art of Separation," *Political Theory* 12, no. 3 (1984), 315.
50. Walzer, *Liberalism*, 315.
51. Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, 35.
52. Walzer, *Liberalism*, 315.
53. See e.g. Susan Geason and Paul R. Wilson, *Designing out Crime: Crime Prevention through Environmental Design* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, 1989); Lee Davies, "Designing out Crime: How Good Architecture Can Save Money," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, November 23, 2012), https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2012/nov/23/designing-out-crime-antisocial-behaviour; Alex Andreou, "Defensive Architecture: Keeping Poverty Unseen and Deflecting Our Guilt," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, February 18, 2015), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/feb/18/defensive-architecture-keeps-poverty-undeen-and-makes-us-more-hostile.
54. Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights*. New York: New York University Press, 2012, 13.
55. François Lenormant and Elisabeth Chevallier, *A Manual of the Ancient History of the East to the Commencement of the Median Wars, vol. 1* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1871), p. 62
56. Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," 155.
57. The etymology is particular to Indo-European languages and therefore a particular conception of freedom.
58. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Are Freedom and Liberty Twins?," *Political Theory* 16, no. 4 (1988): pp. 523-552, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591788016004001, p. 529
59. Benveniste Émile, "The Free Man," in *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Chicago: Hau Books, distributed by University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 261
60. Pitkin, *Are Freedom and Liberty Twins,* 530. It is important to note that according to Fenichel Pitkin, "the etymological origins of "freedom" and "liberty" remain disputed, then, and thus cannot authoritatively settle anything about the essence of these concept."
61. See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 62.Hartman argues that "the slave is the object or the ground that makes possible the existence of the bourgeois subject and, by negation or contradistinction, defines liberty, citizenship, and the enclosures of the social body." The forced reproduction of "kinlessness" is inseparable from the imperial expansionist projects of "the European family," 'freedom', whiteness, kinship, the intimacies of desire, sexuality, and the ideological formation of Europe.
62. Doors and windows, which connect the exterior and interior, are designed, of course, to allow and facilitate flows and crossings. Doors and windows are the point at which flow is regulated and access is controlled. Far from being uncomplicated symbols of openness, transparency, or points of access (think of the idiom "my door is always open), doors and windows are well-planned and positioned to "allow those gathered inside to control vision," and "to see clearly what happen[s] outside while restricting what those gathered outside [can] see inside." Doors and windows, especially when open, obscure this logic of spatial and visual control. See Stella Nair, *At Home with the Sapa Inca: Architecture, Space, and Legacy at Chinchero*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015, 125-126.
63. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004, 4.
64. Ibid., 4.
65. Ibid., 4-5.
66. Obioma Nnaemeka, "Racialization and the Colonial Architecture: Othering and the Order of Things," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008), 1750.
67. Adrienne R. Brown, *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019, 3.
68. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 4.
69. Ibid., 3.
70. Ibid., 6.
71. Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996, 125.

72. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 2. Fanon writes that "decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder."
73. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 14-15.
74. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 124.
75. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 109.
76. Ibid., 117.
77. Martin Luther King, "Negroes Are Not Moving Too Fast," *Saturday Evening Post*, November 7, 1964, p. 8.

Negra Hasta La Muerte
(Black Until the Death)

Ashley Ngozi Agbasoga

Black Mexican NGOs and collectives—such as México Negro A.C., AMCO A.C., Colectiva Ñaa Tunda A.C., La SEPIA, and others—have fought for municipal, state, and national recognition for an array of reasons—particularly for promised protections against discriminatory practices and the allocation of deeply needed material and structural resources in Black and Afrodescendant communities throughout the country. In 2015, México counted its Black, Black-Indigenous, and Afro-descendant population for the first time in its intercensal survey since the official institutional abolition of racial categories in 1821. Further, in April 2019, the Mexican Senate voted unanimously to recognize Afro-Mexicans in its constitution. The addition of Section C to Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution "recognizes people, Afro-Mexican towns, and communities as part of the *multicultural composition of the nation*."[1] Some have welcomed this official admission into the nation; others reluctantly so; organizations and community members expressed reservations about what recognition could truly bring to Black communities, often citing the failed infrastructure, investment, and anti-discrimination projects that the Mexican government have promised Indigenous communities since the 1990s.

During this same time period of this very recognition and institutionalization of blackness,[2] the Guardia Nacional (National Guard) was formed. Created as a coalition of officials from the Federal Police, Military Police, and Naval Police, the Guardia Nacional wielded unprecedented powers granted by the government under the guise of national security. The Guardia Nacional has already been cited for numerous brutalities particularly along México's southern border against Black/African and (non-black) Central American migrants.

With the dissemination of images, news reports, and stories from Black migrants, social media soon became ablaze with people expressing their shock and disbelief--often citing the seemingly contradictory nature of the moment**.** How could México extend rights to Black/Afrodescendant people, yet simultaneously oversee such horrors against Black migrants?

In this article, I examine the ways in which the term *Afro* is taken up by the Mexican state in the wake of recent recognition and institutionalization of blackness, arguing that the term serves as a necessary function in that institutionalization. This helps to maintain the state ideology of mestizaje, which requires the continued subjugation and eventual elimination of Black and Indigenous peoples.

It is important to discuss the United States' role in increased border policing and its legacy of training military, police, and death squads for right-wing Latin American governments, and this fact should not be eschewed in the discussion of the Guardia Nacional.[3] Alongside this point, I also urge for a closer examination of the colonial foundations that the Mexican state, as well as the project of modernity established in what is now known as the Americas, contribute to the ways in which Black and Indigenous peoples have continued to experience immense violence.[4] Upon a deeper look into México's past and present, the simultaneity of the State recognition and institutionalization of blackness and the horrific conditions that Black migrants are met with at the hands of Mexican authorities, is not a contradictory but, rather, co-constitutive.

Understanding the utilization of *Afro*[5] as it is deployed by the Mexican state—a term that many Black and Afro-descendant communities deem as a newer term and oftentimes reject—could help illuminate the linkages of the seeming contradiction above. In a moment in which blackness is recognized after hundreds of years of systematic erasure, yet actively monitored, policed, and cracked down upon, I ask: What are the terms and conditions under which blackness is recognized by the state? And what happens with the impossibility of meeting the state's rubrics on inclusion into the (mestizo) state**?** In this piece, I will give a brief history on blackness and mestizaje in what is now known as México, followed by a situating of the "multicultural" present. Following this, I will then use excerpts from my ethnographic work conducted from 2016-2020 to illustrate how Black and Black/Afro-Indigenous women contend with the shift in state recognition of blackness and indigeneity. I hope to contribute into a conversation concerning Black resistance and worldmaking that has been and is present in not only the territory widely known as Mexico, but also throughout the Americas/Abya Yala.

A Brief on Mestizaje and Blackness in México

Historian Herman Bennett notes that in 1640, New Spain "contained the second-largest population of enslaved Africans and the greatest number of free blacks in the Americas"[6] And, despite the much heavier attention given to Africans and their descendants situated in coastal areas, Mexico's Black and Afro-descendant population historically have lived in large numbers throughout the country—particularly in urban areas such as Mexico City which, at one time, had the largest concentration of Africans in the urban New World.[7]

The colonial Latin American racial classification system—*La Sistema de Castas* (The Caste System)—was a racial classification schema based on various degrees of mixing. The Casta system set and routinized "genealogical requirements" that "helped shape social practices, notions of self, and concepts of communal belonging."[8] These racial configurations often shifted across spatiotemporal contexts to reflect and represent different racial "mixtures"; however, what remained constant

was that Black and/or Indigenous people were always depicted at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

With the waves of independence movements throughout Latin America in the early 1800s also came an official abolishment of the Casta system that had been present in the region for more than 200 years. Mexico was no exception; under the brief administration of Vicente Guerrero, an Afro-Mexican himself, slavery was abolished in 1829 and racial classifications were abolished.

Of course, this did not mean that race disappeared. In fact, its extrajudicial nature expanded in a place where Mexican state officials, intellectuals, and mestizo society alike espoused that because the modern nation was "mixed," that there was no race—and therefore, there could be no racism. This framework became the foundation to which Mexico and many other Latin American nations constructed its emerging nation-states in the dawn of independence from Spain and Portugal.

During the post-revolutionary government of Álvaro Obregón, the Mexican government officially adopted mestizaje—characterized mainly as the "mixing" of European and Indigenous peoples[9]—and to a different degree, Black people. In his seminal text La Raza Cósmica, the Secretary of Public Education José Vasconcelos constructed a mestizo vision for Mexico's future, consisting of what he termed a Cosmic Race. The Cosmic Race, as Vasconcelos viewed it, consisted of "A mixture of races… [that] will lead to the creation of a type infinitely superior to all that have previously existed."[10]

Although engagements with Vasconcelos and his most notable text discuss his emphasis on European and Indian mixture to secure a more modern race, Vasconcelos did not ignore the vast Black population in Latin America:

> The lower types of the species will be absorbed by the superior type. In this manner, for example, the Black could be redeemed, and step by step, by voluntary extinction, the uglier stocks will give way to the more handsome… The Indian, by grafting onto the related race, would take the jump of millions of years… and in a few decades of aesthetic eugenics, the Black may disappear, together with the types that a free instinct of beauty may go on signaling as fundamentally recessive and undeserving, for that reason, of perpetuation.[11]

This passage, as well as others throughout the text, demonstrate that mestizaje (and in this case, Vasconcelos' version) advocated for the direct, "voluntary" extinction of Black people in Mexico and Latin America; for Indigenous people, Vasconcelos used the language of assimilation—a supposed, more humane version in comparison to the United States and its extermination of Native Americans. Nonetheless, mestizaje, and by extension the modern Mexican citizen, is predicated upon the eventual extinction—through assimilation or other means—of Black and Indigenous people.

Vasconcelos and his version of mestizaje ideology wielded immense political, social, and economic influence, as the *mestizo* became the Mexican citizen and

continues to be central in Mexican education, construction of monuments representative of the state, and the arts. The only place for Indigenous and Black/Afrodescendants in mestizaje were thus placed in the past.

Mexico's Multicultural Present

The 1980s through the first decade of the 21st century saw a sweep in institutional recognition of Black and Indigenous populations throughout Latin America.[12] In México's case, 1992 marked the year in which the national senate amended Mexico's constitution to not only state Indigenous rights; it also declared itself a pluricultural nation.[13] Twenty-seven years later, in April of 2019, the Mexican National Senate voted unanimously to recognize Afro-Mexicans in its constitution under Article 2, Section C.

This move was greatly celebrated by groups that had advocated for national recognition. *La Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Ciudad de México* (The Mexico City Human Rights Commission) released a press statement on the constitutional recognition soon after:

> *Esta Defensoría considera que era imprescindible la Declaratoria del Congreso de la Unión de la Reforma Constitucional en materia de reconocimiento a las personas afrodescendientes para subsanar la deuda de invisibilidad y exclusión que han enfrentado por más 400 años. La adición del Apartado C, al Artículo 2 de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos reconoce a las personas, pueblos y comunidades afromexicanas como parte de la composición pluricultural de la nación… Para esta Comisión de Derechos Humanos, la adición constitucional significa un momento histórico para México, pues desde su llegada a este territorio, la población afrodescendiente ha padecido discriminación estructural, a través de un desigual ejercicio de sus derechos humanos, tanto a nivel individual como colectivo.*
>
> [This [human rights commission] considers that the Declaration of the Congress of the Union of Constitutional Reform regarding recognition of people of African descent
> to correct the invisibility and exclusion debt that they have faced for over 400 years.
> The addition of Section C to Article 2 of the Constitution Policy of the United Mexican States recognizes people, Afro-Mexican towns and communities as part of the multicultural composition of the nation… For this Human Rights Commission, the constitutional addition is a historic moment for Mexico, because since arriving in this territory, the Afro-descendant population has suffered structural discrimination, through unequal exercise of your human rights, both individually and collectively.]

The imposition and regulation of blackness occurred in the quotidian and official state documents. In 2020, *El Universal*—a prominent Mexican national newspaper,

ran a piece titled *Censo 2020: Cuentan a los Afro por primera vez* (Census 2020: The Afros are counted for the first time). In the section titled "Afromexicano," Rosa María Castro, president of the Association of Women from the Coast of Oaxaca (AMCO) tells the reporter that Mexico's national statistics bureau, INEGI, insisted on the term "Afromexicano" instead of others such as Negro/a/x. She further explained: "Fue duro imponernos con el término afromexicano… Llevamos más de 20 años luchando por que se nos reconozca. No estamos mendigando nada, estamos exigiendo un derecho que ya se nos reconoció en la Constitución" (It was hard to impose ourselves with the Afro-Mexican term. We have been fighting for more than 20 years to be recognized. We are not begging for anything, we are demanding a right that has already been recognized in the Constitution).

This moment illuminates two important things to note: the desire to have the rights allotted by the Mexican state to Black Mexicans, as already in the constitution; and 2), the tension that was articulated by Rosy and other leaders of collectives (oftentimes led by women) concerning the government's insistence on prioritizing *Afro* over the term *negro*, a term used by communities for centuries.

This Word is Foreign: The Term Afro and Blackness

Every November for the last twenty years, México Negro A.C. and a growing number of groups that advocate for rights and recognition of Black and African descendants collaborate with the Mexican government to put on the National Meeting of Afro-Mexican Towns. Filled with three days of panels, talks, and cultural expositions, representatives of Black, moreno, and prieto[14] communities convene for a few days to reconnect, discuss issues that pertain to Black communities, and speak on panels concerning cultural and political matters.

The feel of 2019's *encuentro*[15] was thick with anticipation; it was on the heels of the national 2020 census, the first in Mexico's independent history in which Black people of African descent would be counted and included. But the thickness in the air was not just from anticipation, but also skepticism. Zora*, a Black organizer and teacher in Mexico City, was one of the most vocal of skeptics.

On one of the evenings, in which a panel of Afro-Mexican representatives from across the nation spoke, Zora asked anyone that crossed her path: "Excuse me, is this the panel for Black Mexican representatives? Are they [pointing to the women on stage] Black?"

Some ignored, others shrugged in ambivalence; others replied with "Afro." The explanations for this term, when pressed, were different; however, all of the replies illuminated a growing conflict that many in various iterations of the movement were starting to harbor: that although they had finally achieved one of the central tenets of the Black Mexico movement—recognition by the national government, both in the census and the national constitution—the State had invented and carefully curated its own version of blackness that was made legible to the wider non-Black and non-Indio mestizo hegemonic population.

Representatives at the recent meeting were all lighter skinned; darker skinned participants were not as readily chosen as panelists or performers. This point of contention has been called out by various collectives and people who are racialized as *negro/a/x* or *Prieto/a/x* who often embodied a Black politic that called into question how *Afro* was different from their experiences as Black people in Mexico. 2019 marked the first time that the meeting was in Mexico City; yet, some of the organizing groups and collectives that were based in Mexico City felt shut out and unwelcomed from the annual meeting due to their stances on the Black migrant crisis and critique of the term that permeated every announcement of the meeting: Afro. Members across collectives—some vocally, others not—expressed frustration on how those that live an embodied Black, moreno, or prieto identity were sidelined in the meeting in lieu of what the Mexican state viewed as ideal blackness. In an article with the blog *Afrofemininas*, Scarlett Estrada troubled the identifier of *mestizo*: "Miscegenation is a concept that homogenizes the population, which was sought by 20th century nationalism. Consequently, Mexican black people have been made invisible… Mixed race? Mexican? I wondered frequently. Neither of the two "roots" identifies me."[16] Scarlett and others trouble and defy the assimilationist project of mestizaje by not only using Negro, but also taking up a Black politic that directly challenges the false promises of multiculturalism.[17]

Outside of the meeting, collectives in Mexico City, such as Flores de Jamaica and Panafricanistas, pointed out the hypocrisy of the Mexican government for recognizing blackness and paying lip service to correct the wrongs that 400 years of intentional invisibilization and discrimination had caused Black and Afrodescendants in its nation. At the same time, news stories concerning the horrific conditions that Black migrants from Central America, Haiti, and West Africa suffered under in detention centers on both of Mexico's international land borders. Dispatches from Tapachula, a town in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, showed the violence that the Guardia Nacional imposed on migrants;[18] some trying to reach the United States for political asylum, others in search of a better life that Mexico could possibly offer.

Solidarity with Black migrants was central to many organizers and their politic as Black and Prietx people. Leona Uhuru, a self-identified prieta and Pan-Africanist artist, noted:

> I learned that being prieta is a condition that not only determines race, a prieta can be Black or indigenous or both. In Mexico, the word "prieto" is used to derogatively describe a condition of class, race and gender marginality, that is to say being prieto is being peripheral with melanin and non-white features. The vindication of the word prieta in Mexico is important to me because everyone knows it and uses it in an internalization of racism to describe other people who do not follow the white aspirational ideals.. this word is the bridge to retake it with pride and as a strategy to discuss mainly racial issues in Mexico, which are very little identified and talked about in Mexican society… But for me, a prieta, Afro-Native woman in Mexico, the

> pan-Africanist movement is a worldview from which we cannot escape, based on the principles and philosophy of the international community and solidarity among our people for the progress and justice of our people, in other words, the pan-Africanist movement is the clear guide to the praxis of unity and alliance with oppressed people to survive white supremacy.

These testimonials from people who identified as or with across the multitudes of black identity signifiers—negro/a, Prieto/a, and in particular instances, moreno/a—demonstrate a racial paradigm that sits outside of the state's conception of what is acceptable for the modern Mexican citizen. For one to "move up", noting here a socioeconomic and literal upward racial mobility, one must discard of what is incompatible with the nation's mestizaje. Some are unable to because of racial assemblages that mark them always as Black and/or Indigenous. Others that could racially shift—albeit to an extent because of the function of blackness and indigeneity—chose not to.

In a 2016 interview with a community leader in Guerrero, one noted how "Here [in this moreno town], one may not identify as negro because it could limit their possibilities of obtaining a job, opportunities, or a life that one respects." This indicated literal consequences that determined the quality of life for one depending on not only how they and the geography in which are racialized—but also how they racialized themselves.

In a recent interview concerning Black census workers and communities,[19] Mariela Zaguilan Daza a poll worker, notes that the community does not answer to the term "Afro-Mexican"; instead, they only use Black, said with pride. When asked the question on the census concerning identification as Afro, Azela Dominga Oliva from La Boquilla, Oaxaca, answers:
"Negra hasta la muerte." *Black until the death.*

Endnotes

1. *Comision de Derechos Humanos Del Distrito Federal*, 2019; emphasis mine.
2. Starting with Peña Nieto's administration, but with inclusion of the Mexican constitution and the 2020 census happened under the Andrés Manuel López Obrador AMLO government.
3. The United States has a long history of imperialism throughout the world, and in particular, Latin America. See Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America,* 1971; Greg Gandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin American, The United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*, 2007. The United States continues this violent legacy with its relationship to Mexico (from its acquisition of land from the 1840s onward, parasitic economic policy such as NAFTA, and the current president's policies towards its shared border with México and the formation of Guardia Nacional). See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/26/mexico-immigration-amlo-enforcement-trump.
4. For further discussion, see: Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis: Universiy of Minnesota Press, 2007; Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* vol. 15, no. 2 (2000), 215–232; Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* vol 21, no. 2-3 (2007), 168-178; Tiffany Lethabo King, "New World Grammars: The 'Unthought' Black Discourses of Conquest" *Theory & Event* vol. 19, no. 4 (2016); Maria Elena Martinez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008; Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1997.

5. A quick, important note on terms: As we move across spatiotemporal contexts, so also do terminologies that people use to describe themselves and others. Here, I do my best to do the work of translating as closely as possible terms used—sometimes interchangeably, sometimes not—from Spanish to English. It is important to note that usage of these terms in other contexts does not automatically equate to a distancing of blackness. Rather, I join a rising tide of scholars and members across the diaspora that are raising concerns about the shifting meanings of Afro as an inclusionary project. For a rich discussion on the shifting use of racialized terms that pertain to blackness in México, see also: Varela Huerta, Itza Amanda, "Formas de nombrar: espacios de inclusion/exclusion." *Estudiar el racismo: afrodescendientes en México*, (Instituto Nacional de Anthropología e Historia, 2019), 481-520.
6. Herman L Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003, 2-15.
7. Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, 4.
8. María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011, 6.
9. Fabiola López-Durán, *Eugenics in the Garden: Transatlantic Architecture and the Crafting of Modernity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018, 31.
10. Ibid.
11. Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 171; José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La Raza Cósmica*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1979, 32.
12. See Juliet Hooker, "Indigenous Inclusion/Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity, and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37 (2): 285-310; Tianna S. Paschel *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
13. The Mexican Constitution, Article 2.
14. A note on terms *Negro/a/x/e, Moreno,* and *Prieto*: Negro is Spanish for Black; moreno, often meaning "darker-skinned" in most of Spanish speaking Latin America and Mexico, is used a bit differently in the Costa Chica region of Guerrero and Oaxaca to note one of "mixed" Black/African and Indigenous heritage. Prieto, often used in a derogatory manner that index one's perceived lower class or racial status, has shifted into a racialized term of endearment in Mexico City and elsewhere by those who would be called this as a slur. For some, the use of these terms—or rather, how they are deployed onto particular flesh—depend on temporal, spatial, and geographical contexts.
15. The Spanish term for *meeting*.
16. https://afrofeminas.com/2019/07/03/las-personas-negras-mexicanas-existimos/
17. Many scholars within the fields of Black Studies and Indigenous Studies have pointed out the illusions of multiculturalism. In particular, see Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008; Audra Simpson, *Mohawkus Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2014; Denise Ferreira da Silva, "'Bahia Pêlo Negro': Can the Subaltern (Subject of Raciality) Speak?," *Ethnicities* 5, no. 3 (2005), 321–42.; the work of Charles Hale, and others.
18. This is from the reporting of Brooke Kipling; numerous solidarity campaigns that exposed the horrors of Mexico's southern border that migrants face, including direct reports from the organization *Humanizing Deportation*; as well as personal testimonies, such as http://humanizandoladeportacion.ucdavis.edu/en/2019/10/05/218-the-hard-way-but-the-only-way/).
https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/immigration-panama-colombia-darien/
19. Chaca, Roselia. "'Soy Negra': Afros Abrazan Su Raíz En Censo Del Inegi." *El Universal* , March 15, 2020. https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/soy-negra-afros-abrazan-su-raiz-en-censo-del-inegi.

All Things Are Dear That Disappear

Joshua Bennett

> However, just as the sun shines on the godly and the ungodly alike, so does nuclear radiation. And with this knowledge it becomes increasingly difficult to embrace the thought of extinction purely for the assumed satisfaction of—from the grave—achieving revenge. Or even of accepting our demise as a planet as a simple and just preventative medicine administered to the universe. Life is better than death, I believe, if only because it is less boring, and because it has fresh peaches in it. In any case, Earth is my home—though for centuries white people have tried to convince me I have no right to exist, except in the dirtiest, darkest corners of the globe.
>
> So let me tell you: I intend to protect my home.
>
> —Alice Walker, "Only Justice Can Stop a Curse"

> The division of matter into nonlife and life pertains not only to matter but to the racial organization of life as foundational to New World geographies. The biopolitical category of nonbeing is established through slaves being exchanged for and as gold. Slavery was a geologic axiom of the inhuman in which nonbeing was made, reproduced, and circulated as flesh.
>
> —Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*

> *We are* now identified as those who are about to die. We who can die tomorrow. And therefore, I think, this is where modern scholarship must come in.
>
> —Sylvia Wynter, "Afro-American Culture and Social Order"

Midway through June Jordan's largely under-theorized reflection on black cognition—or, from another angle, what we might call black thought *as such*—"A Poem About Intelligence, For My Brothers and Sisters," the poem's speaker offers up an extended meditation on Albert Einstein's role in the invention of the atomic bomb, as well as the symbolic import of that historical truth in a present-day conversation about the socially imposed, ostensibly antonymous, relationship between blackness and genius. Jordan writes:

> Take Einstein
> being the most the unquestionable the outstanding
> the maximal mind of the century
> right?
> And I'm struggling against this lapse leftover
> from my Black childhood to fathom why
> anybody should say so:
> *E=mc squared?*
> I try that on this old lady live on my block:

She sweeping away Saturday night from the stoop
and mad as can be because some absolute
jackass have left a kingsize mattress where
she have to sweep around it stains and all she
don't want to know nothing about in the first place
"Mrs. Johnson!" I say, leaning on the gate
between us: "What you think about somebody come up
with an *E* equals *M C 2?*"
"How you doin," she answer me, sideways, like she don't
want to let on she know I ain'
combed my hair yet and here it is
Sunday morning but still I have the nerve
to be bothering serious work with these crazy
questions about
"*E* equals what you say again, dear?"
Then I tell her, "Well
also this same guy? I think
he was undisputed Father of the Atom Bomb!"[1]

Jordan goes on to further describe the interaction between the speaker and the neighbor they have unwittingly recruited into this conversation about ethics and legible intellect. One which doubles as a critique of the systematic derogation of the inner worlds of black folks, as well as the ubiquitous dis-valuing of the social practices and protocols which constitute the black social scene. Notice as well the way in which Jordan juxtaposes this conversation with the "serious work" that her neighbor is undertaking prior to her interruption. In Jordan's hands, this becomes a moment of revaluation and repair, an occasion to celebrate the everyday intellectual labor of black women elders who might not have the time to, as my grandmother would phrase it, *study*—i.e., dedicate not only one's intellectual energies, but worry or concern— Einstein or his colleagues in large part because they have countless other matters to attend to, many of which are bound up with the care of others. In a number of divergent ways, this ethic of care is embodied at the level of the conversation itself:

"That right." She mumbles or grumbles, not too politely
"And dint remember to wear socks when he put on
his shoes!" I add on (getting desperate)
at which point Mrs. Johnson take herself and her broom
a very big step down the stoop away from me
"And never did nothing for nobody in particular
lessen it was a committee
and
used to say, 'What time is it?'

and
you'd say, 'Six o'clock.'
and
he'd say, 'Day or night?'
and
and he never made nobody a cup a tea
in his whole brilliant life!
and
[my voice rises slightly]
and
he dint never boogie neither: never!"

"Well," say Mrs. Johnson, "Well, honey,
I do guess
that's genius for you."[2]

The stakes of the conflict that Jordan outlines are fairly straightforward. On the one hand, there is a dominant, post-Enlightenment vision of human intelligence—one that Jordan elaborates upon here not only through remarking upon the historical relationship between the Albert Einstein and the atomic bomb, but also the sort of casual thoughtlessness she then ascribes to the metonymic historical figure she has built from the ground up—that is generally exclusionary, and thoroughly anti-black. What's more, Jordan seems to assert, however subtly, that there is a competing vision of mental acuity that leaves space for high- level cognition in its normative guises, as well as other, less legible, distinctly social forms such as cleaning up the neighborhood, dancing for no clear reason, or making a cup of tea for someone you love. These are examples of intelligence *by other names*. Brilliance in every shade you can imagine. The varied forms of social and emotional intelligence invoked by Jordan, at least as they appear within the universe of the poem, show up in the world as *care*, and often operate in meaningful contradistinction to more widely celebrated modes of intellection.

If the sort of brilliance we are inclined, socially and otherwise, to praise in Einstein— which, it bears mentioning, is not reducible to his legacy as an individual historical actor, but in fact represents a more general set of economic and political procedures through which scientific research comes to serves as cog and fuel for state-sponsored war machines the world over—has led to widespread, unchecked devastation by the instruments of American empire, then what other approaches might be available to us? How might we identify, and ultimately celebrate, the modes of creative praxis that Jordan positions against more legible, widely venerated expressions of aptitude, interiority, and intellectual labor?

It bears mentioning here that Jordan was not alone in her wisdom and willingness to forge a connection between a more general critique of nuclear

proliferation—one explicitly rooted in international solidarity with the darker peoples of the world—and attention to the specific, historically grounded ways in which the increase in the use of nuclear weapons in the U.S. served as an especially fearsome omen for Black Americans. As Vincent J. Intondi's recent monograph, *African Americans Against the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons, Colonialism, and the Black Freedom Movement* reminds us, Jordan was part of an expansive tradition of Black writers and thinkers warning the world against the altogether ineluctable danger of atomic bombs in the hands of the U.S. government. Using W.E.B Du Bois as an exemplar of this particular segment of the black radical tradition, Intondi writes:

> For Du Bois, the fact that the victims of the atomic bombings were nonwhite only further validated the idea that race, peace, and colonization were connected and the black freedom struggle was indeed global. In June 1946, Du Bois took part in a massive "Big Three Unity Rally" organized by the Council on African Affairs (CAA) at Madison Square Garden. Between 15,000 and 19,000 heard Du Bois, Robeson, Yergan, Mary McLeod Bethune [...] and others condemn the exploitation of Africa by colonial powers, especially the United States through its import of uranium to make atomic bombs.[3]

It's critical, then, that we understand Jordan's line of theorization in "Poem About Intelligence, For My Brothers and Sisters" as not only an extension, but an expansion, of the arguments forwarded by Du Bois, Roberson, Bethune and others: an instrumentalization of the poetic register and the myriad freedoms it provides to frame this ongoing political conflict vis-a-vis a conversation between herself and a beloved elder. In doing so, Jordan brings the global stakes of the questions Intondi forwards here into the realm of the everyday, offering an entry to point to those who might not be readily aware of this moment in the history of black freedom struggle and what it means for the ways we must necessarily approach contemporary questions around anti-blackness, black critical theory, and the specter of the end of Days. All of which is to say: we have been here before. We have always lived in the midst of a world at the brink, or just beyond it. Jordan reminds us that our present collective nightmare is not without precedent, and that just as sure as our worst fears can only be defeated once they are reckoned with, and imaginatively engaged, we likewise need not think that we are without the instruments we need in order to survive.

Following this line of inquiry, this essay will focus on the various ways in which Jordan's writing about the atomic bomb, as well as other forms of pending ecological destruction, propel us toward a vision of black love as not only that which binds black people to one another, but that which serves as a bridge between black human beings and nonhuman life-worlds. This is a fraught proximity to be sure, but one that Jordan navigates with great care and unrestrained imagination, daring to say that, in the style of Luther Vandross, *the power of love* is not to be found in

the promise of safety or security, of a bond that lasts always, but rather the fact of our collective impermanence. I will focus primarily on two of Jordan's poems—alongside the aforementioned "Poem About Intelligence"—to undertake this larger endeavor: "On a New Year's Eve" and "From Sea to Shining Sea," reading both works within the context of Jordan's wider oeuvre, as well as the wealth of resources made available by the recent environmental turn in Black literary studies; a shift characterized by a cooperative reckoning with the notion that, as my colleague Treva Ellison once phrased it in a dazzling riff on Cedric Robinson: *Black studies is an ecological critique of Western Civilization.*

I will argue that Jordan's poems represent an especially staunch version and vision of this particular critique, braiding environmental ethics and black poetics towards the ends of asserting the irreducible, always already present connection between the two, a timeless romance between black critical praxis and the stewardship of the Earth. Her assertion, it seems, is that these twin modes of reading the Word and the World operate in much the same vein as the way Bertrand Russell once defined philosophy itself, as the "No-Man's Land between theology of science."[4] In this No Man's Land—which, in this context, bears the trace of course of Sylvia Wynter's ever-relevant intellectual project[5]—between the pursuit of the numinous and a *necessarily poetic* engagement with the sweeping range of modern scientific developments that made new, and increasingly pervasive, forms of ecological domination and devastation possible, Jordan crafts a timeless vision; a black terrapoetics of the land and sea and the untamable darkness underneath them. In a tradition indelibly marked by its careful attention to the opaque social spheres of nonhuman life forms, Jordan stands apart as a writer dually committed to both an aesthetics and a politics of solidarity across species and epoch: a *science of the Word* [6] in its most robust sense, the bladed edge of the black environmental imagination given language, vigor, and form.

***

Via the work of its title alone, "On a New Year's Eve" begins in the spirit of celebration and possibilities yet unseen. We arrive halfway through the poem, however, in altogether divergent territory, grappling with the constraints placed on human love by the masters of global capital and their ecocidal logics:

> the temporary is the sacred
> takes me out
>
> and even the stars and even the snow and even
> the rain
> do not amount to much unless these things submit to some disturbance
> some derangement such
> as when I yield myself/belonging
> to your unmistaken

body

and let the powerful lock up the canyon/mountain
peaks the
hidden rivers/waterfalls the
deepdown minerals/the coalfields/goldfields
diamond mines close by the whoring ore
hot
at the center of the earth

spinning fast as numbers
I cannot imagine

let the world blot
obliterate remove so-
called
magnificence
so-called
almighty/fathomless and everlasting
treasures/
wealth
(whatever that may be)

it is this time
that matters

it is this history
I care about[7]

What we might at first read as a certain anthropocentrism in the mind of the speaker—i.e., "it is this history/I care about" as a singular concern with *human history*, the interpersonal connection between this speaker and the beloved over and against the natural history of the dying landscape described throughout the poem in vivid detail—in broader context reveals itself as an ethos grounded in a shared sense of *precariousness*, the deeply held knowledge that those who are called black and the most vulnerable forms of life on Earth are intertwined in their experience of making do at the cusp of destruction. Put another way, what Jordan highlights here is the sort of love that emerges in a state of emergency, the bonds that are built when we know that death can come at any moment. The time that matters, the line appears to imply, is the time we spend imagining another order of things in concert with one another. When the speaker proclaims that "the temporary is sacred," we are meant to read this claim as an overturning of dominant cosmology. Rather than living our life in constant, dogged pursuit of the eternal—at least within the scope,

or else on and in the terms, of a temporality we can fathom from within this present mortal envelope—Jordan avers that we must, alongside Baby Suggs[8] and others, love the flesh, and celebrate it precisely for the fact of its transience. This is the very essence of what we might properly think of as *black time,* the time of blackness, a window into the temporal imagination of those who live on borrowed time, and often in persevering communion with those who are also vulnerable and not long for this world, hunted by forces which lay claim to the bounty of both the heavens and the here-and-now. To hold the temporary as sacred is to invert a system of value in which one invests only in that which lasts, accrues worth over time, or can contribute to the glory and strength of an individual legacy. Jordan spurns such well-worn truisms for a fleeting, momentary allegiance, one that puts her at risk of losing everything she might lay claim to, including her very life.

Considered within this frame, what does black sociality make available to our understanding of our relationship not necessarily to some all-encompassing vision of the environment, but ecological catastrophe in particular?[9] In the time of blackness, how does catastrophe more generally register, and what larger lessons might be gleaned from that archive of brutal cataclysm and astonishing improvisation? For Jordan, it appears, a poetry specifically attuned to the dying world is one means through which we might access, or else invent, a critical vocabulary for black feeling, might assert the breaking into the mortal plane of a black love that is both resistance and that which exceeds it, love as a sort of black operation, black love as an act of *marronage*:

> I have rejected propaganda teaching me
> about the beautiful
> the truly rare
>
> (supposedly
> the soft push of the ocean at the hushpoint of the shore
> supposedly
> the soft push of the ocean at the hushpoint of the shore
> is beautiful
> for instance)
> but
> the truly rare can stay out there
>
> I have rejected that
> abstraction that enormity
> unless I see a dog walk on the beach/
> a bird seize sandflies
> or yourself
> approach me
> laughing out a sound to spoil
> the pretty picture
> make an uncontrolled

heartbeating memory
instead

I read the papers preaching on
that oil and oxygen
that redwoods and the evergreens
that trees the waters and the atmosphere
compile a final listing of the world in
short supply

but all alive and all the lives
persist perpetual
in jeopardy
persist
as scarce as every one of us
as difficult to find
or keep
as irreplaceable
as frail
as every one of us

and
as I watch your arm/your
brown arm
just before it moves

I know

all things are dear
that disappear

all things are dear
that disappear[10]

This is where black love lives: in the knowledge that black people often do not live for very long, and ergo must cultivate modes of celebration, habits of assembly, that honor this historical circumstance. To persist in blackness is to live and love at the edge of life itself; to feel the pressure of the bulls-eye's glare and nonetheless press on. It is likewise to reject what the speaker calls "propaganda," the state-sponsored miseducation that might inculcate us with false and altogether life-negating visions of the beautiful. And this, of course, is the point at which the world of the poem and the work of the poem cross paths. The poem itself embodies and enacts the very work that this line describes: the active rejection of systems of value rooted in deficiency. Rather, the speaker seems to say, we must turn toward the infinite resources we have in each other, the *affective* resources one cultivates when an entire

order is built upon the derogation, and ultimately denial, of our very personhood. We do not have to look to the natural world in order to understand endangerment as a dominant frame, nor must we regard that framing as the only one worthy of our intellectual energies, whether at the level of allegiance or deconstructive critique. Indeed, what we find here—in varied moments of intimacy between persons that have been historically made *the sociolegal equivalent of things*—is a kind of countervailing force against this derogative interpretive lens. There is a transformative potential made available to us when we linger with the plenitude produced by those who know no other life apart from what the world would call precarious, though they call it by a host of other, more beautiful, more terrible names.

At the intersection of the interpersonal and the planetary, we discover here an alternative approach to imagining the space between life and death, apocalypse and infinite possibility. For Jordan, meaningful attention to the anguish of the Earth is best cultivated through a kind of robust meditative practice, a thinking of the environment not as an unknowable expanse at a great distance, but as an ornate web of collectivities crashing into us from all sides, a daily encounter with obscure and unheralded forms only made legible in the briefest gasp or glimpse, our vision splintered by the very nature of our all too human remove. This is the abstraction that the speaker rejects: the world rendered altogether impersonal and untouchable. And this alongside a widespread ideological emphasis on both ecological and economic scarcity, which within the world of the poem obscures the revolutionary, revelatory potential of living in the break between the good life and the everyday gambit of barely surviving a landscape structured, narratively and otherwise, around one's social, civic, and biological death.

The anaphora of the last four lines helps drive Jordan's central set of questions home: for those of us barred from the province of Man, how do we craft a critical lexicon of beauty, or value? For those forms of life misread as dead and dying, what is the relationship between precariousness and *preciousness*, cherishment and certain doom? Through the consistent use of both enjambment and repetition throughout (*all things are dear that disappear* as the longing, whispered echo at poem's end) Jordan re-creates this sense of pure velocity, the sensation that we are, collectively, as a species racing towards the end of things at breakneck speed. The poem's structure calls for us to lose ourselves in that pure thrill rather than pause for breath, or else in order to take a proper, exhaustive account of the landscape surrounding us. Instead, not unlike the poem's speaker, we are called to look nowhere else but in the eyes of the one right in front of us. The one we must claim responsibility for: the ever-present, irreducibly opaque other, to whom we owe everything.

***

What we call the world today is not only the convergence of the histories of peoples that has swept away the claims of the philosophies of History but also the encounters (in consciousness) among these histories and materialities of the planet. Catastrophic fires reactivate the work of genocides, famines and droughts take

root in suicidal political regimes; warring parties defoliate on a staggering scale; floods and hurricanes call forth international solidarity, yet no one can prevent them or really combat their effects [...] The woes of the landscape have invaded speech, rekindling the woes of humanities, in order to conceive of it. Can we bear ad infinitum this rambling on of knowledge? Can we get our minds off it?

—Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

First published in her 1985 collection, the aptly titled *Living Room,* June Jordan's "From Sea to Shining Sea" is a tour de force. The poem is one that displays her extensive array of skills as a poet seemingly all at once, e.g., her adeptness at moving between register, her ear for internal rhyme, and her willingness to pivot deftly between the ecological, the personal, and the explicitly sociopolitical, in the process exposing the disciplinary tendency to separate the three as not only arbitrary, but in and of itself an expression of the dominant order's most violent protocols:

> *This was not a good time to live in Queens*
>
> Trucks carrying explosive nuclear wastes will
> exit from the Long Island Expressway and then
> travel through residential streets of Queens
> en route to the 59th Street Bridge, and so on.
>
> *This was not a good time to live in Arkansas*
>
> Occasional explosions caused by mystery
> nuclear missiles have been cited
> as cause for local alarm, among
> other things.
>
> *This was not a good time to live in Grand Forks North Dakota*
>
> Given the presence of a United States' nuclear
> missile base in Grand Forks North Dakota
> the non-military residents of the area feel
> that they live only a day to day distance from certain
> annihilation, etcetera.[11]

As was the case in "On a New Year's Eve," we begin with the question of temporality, *low life*[12] as that which is lived in a perpetual state of flight from one exigency to the next. In the intricate dance from stanza to stanza, the speaker crafts a map that spans the continental United States, these three, disparate locations—which, bear in mind are each of a fundamentally different kind: the most diverse borough in NYC, an entire state, and a city of 57,000 people in the Dakotas—which stand in for a network of unnamed populations similarly brutalized by the everyday reality of environmental injustice. The repetition of the phrase "This was not a good time"

carries within its body a more than a considerable measure of irony. The implication, of course, is that there is never a good time to be poor or live in close proximity to a nuclear missile testing site, or a toxic waste dump, or a factory pumping poisonous gas into the air your children breathe. What Jordan is able to undertake in "From Sea to Shining Sea" is the creation of a commons where we might not otherwise imagine one, a collective organized not around any visibly shared identity or sense of history, but simply their present-day proximity to weapons with the power to destroy the world as we know it multiple times over. The speaker takes this thinking several steps further in the poem's closing sections:

> This was not a good time to be a tree
> This was not a good time to be a river
> This was not a good time to be found with a gun
> This was not a good time to be found without one
> This was not a good time to be gay
> This was not a good time to be Black
> This was not a good time to be a pomegranate
> or an orange
> This was not a good time to be against
> the natural order
>
> — Wait a minute —
>
> I am turning under the trees
> I am trailing blood into the rivers
> I am walking loud along the streets
> I am digging my nails and my heels into the land
> I am opening my mouth
> I am just about to touch the pomegranates
> piled up precarious
>
> This is a good time
> This is the best time This is the only time to come together
> Fractious
> Kicking
> Spilling
> Burly
> Whirling
> Raucous
> Messy
> Free
>
> Exploding like the seeds of a natural disorder.[13]

The word "natural" both closes and opens the poem—its first line is "natural order is being restored" which simultaneously bears the trace, perhaps, of both the strikingly paradoxical and the explicitly biopolitical—and works to stunning effect. In the words of the poet Jamaal May, "pomegranate means grenade,"[14] after all, (May is playing on the historical relationship between the weapon and the fruit at the level of both etymology and anatomy) and we see that sort of dexterity at work here in the final lines of the Jordan poem as well. Jordan coins an entirely new phrase, "natural disorder," to describe the multivalent coalition of figures she has just assembled: human and nonhuman, living and nonliving, river and tree and pomegranate all gathered under the aegis of blackness and its magnetic power. This passage serves, in another register, as an evocative instance of what Fred Moten, Nahum Chandler and others would call the "paraontological distinction"[15] between blackness and black people, a distinction which, when taken seriously, opens up space for us to think about *blackened forms of life and nonlife* alongside Jordan. All of these named actors persist in "a certain day to day distance from annihilation"[16] and are, on this basis alone, usefully imagined as existing in a kind of perpetual, agonizing, astonishing solidarity. In this scene, The Negro speaks of rivers on the basis of proximity.[17] An antecedent to what Bill Brown would later term "thing theory"[18]—and what the aforementioned Moten will gesture toward two years later, when he describes the history of blackness as "a testament to the fact that objects can and do resist"[19]—is presaged here, elaborated beautifully in Jordan's poetics of precariousness. Across borders of experience and opacity, between black social life and blackness as the condition of an ever-expanding array of beings, there exists the possibility of not only collaboration, but revolutionary action. In the blur of our shared proximity to utter devastation, an alternative order of operations emerges, and a sociality without edges in its wake.

Endnotes

1. June Jordan, "A Poem About Intelligence for My Brothers and Sisters," *Literature: The Human Experience. 3rd ed. Ed. Richard Abcarian and Marvin Klotz. New York: St. Martin's* 35 (1982).
2. Ibid.
3. Vincent J. Intondi, *African Americans Against the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons, Colonialism, and the Black Freedom Movement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015.
4. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy: Collectors edition*. Routledge, 2013.
5. See Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The new centennial review* vol. 3, no. 3 (2003): 257-337.
6. See Aimé Césaire, "Poetry and knowledge," *Sulfur* 5 (1982), 17.
7. June Jordan, *Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan*. United States: Copper Canyon Press, 2012, 202.
8. Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. Spain: Vintage International, 2004, 104.
9. Sonya Posmentier, *Cultivation and Catastrophe: The Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.
10. Jordan, *Directed by Desire,* 202.

11. Ibid., 325.
12. See Joshua Bennett, *Being Property Once Myself: Blackness and the End of Man*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020, 154.
13. Jordan, *Directed by Desire,* 325.
14. See Jamaal May, *Hum*. Farmington, ME: Alice James Books, 2014, 53.
15. Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)." *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 112, no. 4 (2013): 749.
16. Jordan, *Directed by Desire,* 325.
17. Here, I am alluding to the canonical Langston Hughes poem. See Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995, 23.
18. Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001), 1-22.
19. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 1.

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